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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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Govt convenes all-party meet ahead of Budget

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

The government has called a meeting of floor leaders of different parties in Parliament on Tuesday ahead of the Budget session. It is a customary practice ahead of every session as leaders of different parties highlight the issues they want to raise in Parliament, and the government offers them a glimpse into its agenda and seeks their cooperation. It will be a short session this time, between 31 January and 9 February, with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman set to table an interim budget ahead of the Lok Sabha polls. The new government will present the full-fledged budget. The session will begin with President Droupadi Murmu's address. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

India-Saudi Arabia military exercise starts in Rajasthan

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

The inaugural edition of India-Saudi Arabia joint military exercise 'SADA TANSEEQ', which seeks to develop interoperability, bonhomie and camaraderie between troops from both the sides, began in Rajasthan on Monday, officials said. The exercise is scheduled to be conducted till 10 February. "The Saudi Arabian contingent comprising 45 personnel is being represented by Royal Saudi Land Forces. The Indian Army contingent also comprising 45 personnel is being represented by a battalion from the Brigade of the Guards (Mechanised Infantry)," the Defence Ministry said in a statement. The aim of the exercise is to train troops of both sides for joint operations in semi-desert terrain under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, it said. *—PTI*

Union Min claims CAA will be implemented within 7 days

Shantanu said CAA will be applicable across India before LS polls

KOLKATA, 29 JAN

Union Minister Shantanu Thakur on Monday said the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) would be implemented in the country within a week.

During an interview with a news channel, Thakur, a BJP MP from Bongaon, an area with the majority of people belonging to the Matua community in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district, said that swift implementation of the contentious legislation would be made within seven days.

The CAA, enacted by the BJP-led government at the Centre in 2019, aims at granting Indian citizenship to persecuted non-Muslim migrants, including Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, Parsis and Christians, from Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan who entered India before 31 December, 2014.

Thakur, the Union Minister of State for Ports, Shipping And Waterways, has made a similar comment on Sunday.

He has been claiming that the CAA would be implemented in the country ahead of the Lok Sabha polls this year.

Matuas, who constitute a large chunk of the state's Scheduled Caste population, had been migrating to West Bengal since the 1950s, primarily due to religious persecution in erstwhile East Pakistan which later became Bangladesh.

Shantanu Thakur made the claim in an interview with a news channel PHOTO: PTI

> **Ram mandir in Ayodhya has been inaugurated, and within the next seven days, the CAA will be implemented across the country. This is my guarantee. Not just in West Bengal, the CAA would be implemented in every state**
>
> -Shantanu Thakur, Union Minister

Since the nineties, political parties in West Bengal have actively sought to secure the support of the Matuas, who, due to their significant population and tendency to vote together, are considered a valuable voting bloc akin to the minorities.

The Matua community is believed to benefit the most from the implementation of the CAA.

Thakur's assertion on the CAA's implementation comes amidst reports this month, suggesting that the rules for the legislation would be notified "much before" the announcement of the Lok Sabha elections.

His remarks elicited strong reactions from the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) in the state, which has vehemently opposed the CAA, labelling it "divisive".

Last month, Union Home Minister Amit Shah reiterated that the implementation of CAA is inevitable as it is the law of the land.

During a BJP meeting in Kolkata, he had accused Banerjee of misleading people on the CAA issue

The TMC has consistently opposed the CAA, with Banerjee alleging that the BJP is "exploiting" the citizenship issue for political gain.

The promise of implementing the controversial CAA served as a major electoral platform for the BJP in the previous Lok Sabha and assembly polls in West Bengal.

Party leaders believe that it played a pivotal role in the BJP's rise in the state. *—PTI*

4 students killed in K'taka road accident

The school students were returning to their village after attending the school's annual day gathering PHOTO: IANS

BENGALURU, 29 JAN

Four students were killed and eight others sustained injuries when the school bus they were travelling in collided with a tractor near Alagur village in Jamkhandi taluk of Bagalkote district on Sunday night, police said.

The school students were returning to their village after attending the school's annual day gathering from Alaguru, Jamakhandi Taluk. The deceased have been identified as Govinda Jambagi, 13, Sagar Kadakola, 17, Shweta Patil, 16 and Basavaraj Kotagi, 17. Sagar and Basavaraj were students of Pre-University whereas Shweta and Govind were in class 9.

The injured students have been admitted to a nearby hospital, police said. Reacting to the incident, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said, "Deeply saddened to hear the news of the death of four school children. I pray for the souls of the deceased students to rest in peace. A compensation of Rs 2 lakh each will be given to the families of the students who died in the accident and Rs 50,000 each to the seriously injured students." *—Salar News*

A TRIBUTE TO THE MARSHAL

A new entrance gate and statue dedicated to Field Marshal SHFJ Sam Manekshaw was inaugrated at Manekshaw Parade Ground in Bengaluru on Monday PHOTO: X/@PRODEF_BLR

India will have no more polls if Modi wins in 2024: Kharge

BHUBANESWAR, 29 JAN

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Monday expressed apprehension that the 2024 Lok Sabha elections would be the last opportunity for the people to save democracy, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi might prefer dictatorship in case his party wins the upcoming polls.

He also urged people to keep away from the BJP and its ideologue RSS, alleging that they are "like poison".

"This will be the last opportunity for the people to save democracy in India. If Narendra Modi wins another election, there will be dictatorship in the country. The BJP will rule India like Putin in Russia," Kharge said while addressing a party rally.

Launching a scathing attack on the BJP and RSS, Kharge said that the present government under Modi is being run by threatening states and leaders of the opposition.

"Notices are being served to the leaders and ED & Income Tax has become weapons to grind the political opponents," he claimed adding that the people should be aware of the BJP and RSS ideologies.

He alleged that the leaders are threatened to leave their parties and alliances if they oppose the ideologies of BJP and RSS.

Kharge claimed that Rahul Gandhi was frequently threatened as he opposed the BJP and the RSS.

"However, Rahul Gandhi did not come under their pressure and continues to fight against such forces that are out to divide the nation," the Congress President said.

The Congress president also described Modi as a "habitual liar" whom he accused of misleading the people by assuring two crore jobs every year and Rs 15 lakh money in every Indian's bank account.

Referring to Modi's jibe at Congress's achievements during the last 70 years, Kharge said: "You (Modi) become the chief minister of Gujarat and now the Prime Minister because the Congress had held the democracy and Constitution high. But you are now destroying the basics of democracy and the Constitution."

He said the Congress has given rights to women, Dalits, tribals and the downtrodden by properly implementing the Constitution. *—PTI*

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge addresses the supporters during a public meeting, in Bhubaneswar on Monday PHOTO: PTI

GOVT EXTENDS BAN ON TERROR GROUP SIMI FOR 5 YEARS

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

Centre on Monday extended the ban on terrorist group Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) for five years for its involvement in fomenting terrorism and disturbing peace and communal harmony in the country.

In a post on 'X', Union Home Minister Amit Shah said that bolstering Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of zero tolerance against terrorism, SIMI has been declared an 'Unlawful Association' for a further period of five years under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA). As many as 10 state governments - Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Kerala, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Uttar Pradesh - have recommended the declaration of SIMI as an "unlawful association" under the provisions of the UAPA.

The SIMI was first declared outlawed in 2001 when the Atal Bihar Vajpayee government was in power and since then the ban has been extended periodically. "The SIMI has been found involved in fomenting terrorism, disturbing peace and communal harmony to threaten the sovereignty, security and integrity of Bharat," Shah said. *—PTI*

EC to hold elections for 56 RS seats on 27 Feb

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

Election Commission (EC) on Monday said that the biennial Rajya Sabha polls will be held on February 27 for 56 seats, as the tenure of incumbents including former prime minister Manmohan Singh and BJP President JP Nadda will end in April.

The vacancies also include seats held by nine Union ministers including Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw, Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav and Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya.

Congress can also look forward to sending its nominees to the Upper House of Parliament from Karnataka and Telangana- the states where it came to power last year. In Karnataka, four Rajya Sabha members are retiring, and in Telangana three. In Karnataka, the retiring members are Rajeev Chandrasekhar of BJP and L Hanumanthaiah, GC Chandrashekhar and Syed Nasir Hussain of Congress.

The nomination process will begin on 8 February with the issuance of the notification. 15 February will be the last date for filing nominations while 20 February is the last date to withdraw candidature. Voting will take place from 9 am to 4 pm. Counting will be held on the same day. *—PTI*

A FRIEND IN NEED

Navy rescues hijacked Iranian vessel near Somalia

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

Indian warship INS Sumitra on Monday ensured the safe release of an Iranian-flagged fishing vessel and its 17 crew members after it was hijacked by some pirates off the east coast of Somalia, officials said.

The Indian Navy swiftly responded to a distress call from the vessel last night, they said. "INS Sumitra, deployed on anti-piracy operations along the east coast of Somalia and the Gulf of Aden, responded to a distress message regarding the hijacking of an Iranian flagged fishing vessel Iman," Indian Navy spokesperson Commander Vivek Madhwal said.

The fishing vessel had been boarded by pirates and the crew members were taken as hostages, he said. "INS Sumitra intercepted the vessel, acted in accordance with the established SOPs (standard operating procedures) to coerce the pirates for the safe release of the crew along with the boat and ensured the successful release of all 17 crew members along with the boat," Madhwal said.

Indian warship INS Sumitra ensured safe release of an Iranian fishing vessel on Monday PHOTO: PTI

- US said the Marshall Islands-flagged vessel MV Marlin Luanda was hit by an anti-ship ballistic missile fired by Iran-backed Houthi militants.

The vessel was subsequently sanitised and released for onward transit. "Mission deployed Indian naval ships on anti-piracy and maritime security operations in the Indian Ocean region symbolises the Indian Navy's resolve towards the safety of all vessels and seafarers at sea," Madhwal said.

The response by the Indian Navy to the fresh incident came two days after its warship INS Visakhapatnam extinguished a fire onboard a commercial oil tanker with 22 Indian crew when the vessel was struck by a missile in the Gulf of Aden. The Indian Navy deployed its missile destroyer INS Visakhapatnam to assist the vessel after receiving a distress call from it on Friday night.

The US Central Command (CENTCOM) had said the Marshall Islands-flagged vessel MV Marlin Luanda was hit by an anti-ship ballistic missile fired by Iran-backed Houthi militants. *—PTI*

ED camps at 'missing' Soren's home

NEW DELHI/RANCHI, 29 JAN

An Enforcement Directorate (ED) team on Monday visited the Delhi residence of Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren to question him in connection with a money laundering investigation in an alleged land fraud case. Official sources claimed he was "missing" and could not be contacted by the agency.

Meanwhile, the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) leader, who had left for Delhi from Ranchi on 27 January night, has sent an email to the agency in which he has agreed to a fresh round of questioning by the ED investigators on 31 January at his Ranchi residence around 1 pm.

Officials of the federal probe agency accompanied by Delhi Police personnel reached the 5/1 Shanti Niketan building in South Delhi around 9 am and were still there till late evening, while several media teams stood outside.

"We came to the residence of the Chief Minister to question him but he is not here. ED teams also went to the Jharkhand Bhawan and a few other locations but could not find the Chief Minister," a source said.

The federal agency had questioned Soren at his official residence in Ranchi on 20 January in the alleged land fraud case and had issued a fresh summons to him asking him to confirm his availability for questioning on either 29 January or 31 January, the sources said. *—PTI*

JMM supporters take out a march in support of Hemant Soren over ED team's reaching his New Delhi residence PHOTO: PTI

PHOTO: X\ MLANAHARIS

MLA Haris takes over as new BDA Chairman

BENGALURU, 29 JAN

Fourth-term MLA NA Haris took charge as the chairman of the Bangalore Development Authority (BDA) on Monday Haris, the Shanti Nagar MLA, took over BDA in the presence of Deputy Chief Minister Shivakumar. He succeeded IAS officer Rakesh Singh as the BDA chairman. The appointment follows Haris's election in the first list of board presidents, where a total of 36 MLAs were accommodated in various corporations and boards on 26 January. All Congress leaders appointed for boards and corporations last week will serve a two-year term. Deputy Chief Minister Shivakumar extended his congratulations to MLA Haris on the new role. *—Salar News*

HM seeks ₹500cr for developmental works in Tumakuru

TUMUKURU/ BENGALURU, 29 JAN

Home Minister G Parameshwara on Monday requested State government to allocate Rs 500 crores for developmental works in Tumakuru in the upcoming Budget. He also inaugurated several projects worth Rs 657 crores in Tumakuru. Parameshwara said a new district administration building is needed for the district at the cost of Rs 100 crores and appealed to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah for the sanction. Parameshwara claimed that only six wards out of 35 wards have received funds under the Tumakuru Smart City project. "The remaining 29 wards have not received the money," he said. During Siddaramaiah's previous administration from 2013 to 2018, he had given Rs 2,300 crore to Pavagada and Rs 13,000 crore for the Yettinahole project, and we will remember this, said Parameshwara. *—Salar News*

Govt to hold health camps in rural areas

BENGALURU, 29 JAN

Karnataka government will organise health camps in rural areas to extend the reach of health services in State, said Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao on Monday. "If we see a significant number of people attending such melas, we will organise regular check-ups and health camps for free," Rao after taking part at a Arogya Mela at Kollegal in Chamarajanagar district. The proposed melas will monitor blood sugar levels and carry out checks on diabetes, eyes, heart-related diseases, kidney issues, cancer and others. The officers and staff of Health Department will follow up with those who come to the camp to check if the health issues are cured. If surgery is required, they will be treated in government super-speciality hospitals, the minister said. The Health Minister said the shortage of medicines will be set right in the next three to four months. *—Salar News*

Speeding car kills tiger in State

MYSURU, 29 JAN

A male tiger was killed after being hit by a speeding car while crossing a road in a forest area in Mysuru, a forest official said on Monday. According to the Conservator of Forest, Malathi Priya, the accident occurred near the Mandakalli Airport on the Mysuru-Nanjangud road on Sunday at around 11 pm. The one-and-half-year-old tiger died on the spot, the official said. The Forest department registered a case and seized the car as part of the investigation, Priya said. The 2023 census report pegged the number of tigers in Karnataka at 563. *—PTI*

Mandya tense over hoisting of saffron flag

CM accuses BJP and JD(S) of trying to instigate people with an eye on the coming LS polls

MANDYA, 29 JAN

The situation in Keragodu remained tense on Monday and security beefed up in the village. This was a day after a row broke out over the removal of a 'Hanuman Dhwaja' as protests continued, demanding that the flag with a portrait of Lord Hanuman be reinstated.

The situation remained tense, but under control, even as the incident led to a political slugfest between Congress and Opposition BJP-JD(S), who have joined the protests.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah accused BJP and JD(S) of trying to instigate people on the issue with an eye on the coming Lok Sabha elections.

Police on Sunday had resorted to mild lathicharge to disperse the crowd and bring the situation under control.

The police and administration had hoisted the Tricolour replacing the 'Hanuman Dhwaja'. On Monday, the protesters marched from Keragodu to the Deputy Commissioner's office in the district headquarters of Mandya holding saffron flags amid chants of "Jai Sri Ram". They raised slogans against Congress.

A large contingent of police forces has been deployed as a precautionary measure.

Siddaramaiah clarified the authorities had to intervene as permission was taken to hoist the tricolour and Kannada flag only. He also hit back at BJP for calling him "anti-Hindu", and asserted he is a Hindu who loves people from all religions.

The agitation will continue till the saffron flag is re-hoisted, leaders in the forefront said.

In Keragodu, police have also erected barricades around the flagpole and CCTV cameras have been installed in the.

Most shops and establishments have remained shut in the village.

Meanwhile, BJP leaders and workers held protests at the district headquarters, condemning the "anti-Hindu policy" of the Congress government and accusing it of "insulting" the national flag.

In Bengaluru, BJP staged a protest at Mysuru Bank circle under the leadership of Jayanagara MLA C K Ramamurthy and other leaders.

They were detained and taken away by the police. Police said no permission was granted to stage a protest at the site.

BJP leaders and supporters protest in Bengaluru on Monday against the lowering of Hanuman flag at Mandya district *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Kumaraswamy blames Congress

JD(S) State President HD Kumaraswamy joined the protest against the removal of a saffron flag bearing Lord Hanuman's image. He blamed Congress for creating the fraught situation and failing to handle it effectively.

Hitting out at Siddaramaiah, Kumaraswamy, accused him and his government of playing politics on the issue, and instigating the people by using police force to quell the public unrest.

'BJP is stirring up emotions for political gains'

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Monday accused BJP of stirring up emotions in Mandya to build a political base.

He said, "BJP candidates lost deposit in many constituencies in Mandya, and hence they are trying to find a political base by joining hands with the JD(S). Their efforts will not pay off as the people of Mandya are tolerant and secular, and they will not fall for such gimmicks. Our objective is to ensure peace." *—Salar News*

BJP accuses Congress of appeasing Muslims

BENGALURU, 29 JAN

Leader of Opposition R Ashoka on Monday claimed that Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar are appeasing Muslims. "At a function in Mangaluru, Shivakumar had said that the government stands by you as it will protect people from all castes and religions. Siddaramaiah has proved that Congress can stoop to any level to appease Muslims."he said. *—Salar News*

Won't bow down to BJP's conspiracies: Min

BENGALURU, 29 JAN

A day after a row broke out over the removal of a saffron Hanuman flag in Mandya district, IT and BT Minister Priyank Kharge has hit out at BJP, saying the government won't bow down to their conspiracies on saffronisation.

Drawing parallels with RSS, Kharge accused BJP of showing disrespect to the national flag. "If they don't like the national flag, Indian Constitution and integrity of the nation, their leaders can go to their preferred destination, Pakistan." Kharge said the saffron flag was hoisted against the agreed conditions at Keragodu village. He accused BJP of conspiring to disturb peace and questioned their disregard for law, rules and order. *—Salar News*

CCTVs tampered: Dad of child who died in pre-school

BENGALURU, 29 JAN

Jito Tommy Joseph, the father of four-year-old Gianna Ann Jito who died after falling from the third floor of her pre-school on 25 January at Pallotti Nilaya Road, Challakere in Hennur police station limits, has said he suspects the CCTV footage at the school has been tampered with to cover up the crime. The pre-school has been closed by police pending investigation.

Speaking to **Salar News** from Kottayam in Kerala where the last rites of the child were held at her home town on Saturday, Joseph said: "I strongly suspect that the CCTV footage has been tampered with as a technician had gone to the school a day after the incident and worked on the CCTV."

The distraught father said, "We demand a fair probe into the incident and I strongly suspect the role of the nanny employed in the school for the cause of my child's death. During interrogation, she said she had left my child alone and went downstairs with three other children. How can she leave a child alone on the third floor without supervision? We need to get complete clarity as to how she fell down." He said the autopsy report is awaited which would then direct the probe in the right angle.

Hennur Police Inspector L Deepak told **Salar News** "This is a clear case of negligence which led to the death of the child and we are under the process of investigating and ensuring justice for the child." School principal Thomas Cherian, who has obtained anticipatory bail in the case, said: "All our phones have been confiscated by the police and we are cooperating with the investigation."

The pre-school has been closed by the police pending investigation *PHOTO: PTI*

- Parents of some children who did not wish to be named said they are in the process of stopping their child from attending the school considering the safety of their kids

Parents of some children studying in Delhi Pre School who did not wish to be named said they are in the process of stopping their child from attending the school considering the safety of their children. "I am taking my child out of that school immediately. Why should she study there when there is no safety for the young ones? My heart goes out to the family of Gianna," said Jose Thomas, a parent.

P Jagadish, a shopkeeper located near the school, said: "How can the four-year-old child fall from the third floor. This whole story smacks of suspicion. Can the child scale the wall and fall to death? Why was she there on the third floor? The police should ensure that justice is provided for the child and her parents"

The victim's father said: "The school initially said Gianna hit a wall at the day-care, fell and vomited. The school admitted only later that she fell from the terrace. It is mysterious why the child was on the terrace in the first place."

Her parents, Joseph and Binitta Thomas, are both software engineers and the family moved to Bengaluru seven months ago. Those who knew the family said the talented child loved to compose songs and was the apple of the eye of her parents and was so friendly that she could strike up a conversation with complete strangers.

Hennur police, who had registered an FIR under IPC section 338 against school principal Thomas Cherian for causing grievous hurt by an act endangering life or personal safety of others, have now converted the case into one of causing death due to negligence under IPC section 304A. *—Salar News*

'ASIA'S LARGEST GAMING CONFERENCE'

'AVGC-XR will create 30K jobs'

BENGALURU, 29 JAN

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said his government wants to see Karnataka as a global innovation leader in animation, visual effects, gaming, comics and extended reality (AVGC-XR) technologies and that it will generate 30,000 new high-quality jobs in State by 2028.

"We aim to ensure that exports in the gaming industry constitute at least 80 per cent of the sector's total revenue, and foster sustainability and inclusivity within the AVGC industry," Siddaramiah said after at the inauguration of the fifth edition of Gaming, Animation, Visual FX, Conference (GAFX) 2024, a three-day conference.

In November 2023, the State government released a draft policy on biotechnology and animation, visual effects, gaming, comics and extended reality. The six pillars of the policy include 'Mobile First' AVGC products, skill development, creation of sustainable infrastructure, empowering startups and MSMEs, provision for global market access and business development incentives and financial support for the gaming industry, the Chief Minister said. "Recognising the global and national surge in these industries, the policy aims to leverage Karnataka's existing strengths in IT and Business Process Management to establish the State as a global leader in AVGC-XR," the Congress leader said. The event witnesses a convergence of animation, VFX, and game studios, and technology partners. The sessions also involved training on how to pitch animation stories and games, a panel discussion on women in the gaming industry and animation features from India. Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar highlighted the transformative potential of technology in education through user-friendly animations and the integration of artificial intelligence in the industry. He expressed confidence in the industry's ability to enhance government services and said Bengaluru will play a leading role in the gaming space. *—Salar News*

Siddaramaiah and DK Shivakumar with delegates during the inauguration of the GAFX Summit on Monday *PHOTO: SALAR*

Leaders ask DKS to take necessary steps

BENGALURU, 29 JAN

Leaders of Bengaluru on Monday suggested Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar to take proactive measures in solving drinking water problems, and waste management.

In preparation of the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike's (BBMP) 2024-2025 budget, Shivakumar met with the ministers, MLAs, Rajya Sabha members and Vidhana Parishad members representing Bengaluru in Vikasasoudha.

He said regarding the drinking water, a order has been issued to use six TMC water for Bengaluru as per the Supreme Court order and hence priority will be given to the drinking water. Several members in the meeting requested for a designated place for abandoned and seized vehicles *—PTI*

CANDIDATES FOR BENGALURU TEACHERS' CONSTITUENCY POLLS FILE NOMINATIONS

BENGALURU, 29 JAN

Candidates from the Congress and the NDA filed nominations on Monday for the legislative council election from the Bangalore Teachers' Constituency on 16 February.

Former MLC Puttanna of the Congress and A P Ranganath representing the BJP-JD(S) filed their nominations today. The elections are being held as Puttanna, who held the seat, resigned from the BJP as well as the Legislative Council on 16 March, 2023. Puttanna joined the Congress after quitting BJP and unsuccessfully contested the Karnataka Assembly election last year . *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Power cuts in City today, tomorrow

BENGALURU, 29 JAN

Bengaluru is scheduled to experience power cuts on Tuesday and Wednesday due to ongoing projects by Bangalore Electricity Supply Company (BESCOM) and Karnataka Power Transmission Corporation Limited (KPTCL).

The projects involve maintenance, repairs and other works, including renovation, shifting cables from overhead to underground and tree trimming. Power outages are likely to occur between 10am and 5pm, with a focus on specific areas each day. The schedule includes affected feeders emanating from SRS Davangere and locations such as Thippareddyhalli, Honnuru, Kakibora nahatti and Hanumanthanahalli.

The areas that will be affected include SRS Davangere Hadadi, Yallamma, Belevanuru, Naganuru, Jarikatte, Tholahunase, Vidyanagara, Ranganatha, NJ Taralabalu, Kukkuwada, Turchaghatta, Shamanuru, Saraswathi, Attigere, SS Hi-tech And Vivekananda, Karikere, Devramarikunte, Bhramasagara, Ranikere, Purlhalli, Jajuru, Sumanahalli, Vaderahalli, VV Puram, Chikkaullarty, Gowdara Hatti, Rangavvanahalli, Challakere Rural, Dodderi, Meerasa bhihally, Mallasamudra, Bukkambudhi, Honnuru, BT Pura, Kakiboranahatti, Hanumanthanahally, Obanahally, BM Hatti, Marammanahalli, Netranahalli, Udevu and Konasagara, Chennammanagathihalli, Matsamudra, Kuluvanahalli, Thippareddyhalli, Doddaullarthy, KD Kote, Gataparthy and Gowra Samudra. *—Salar News*

AI REVOLUTION

City boy, buddies create personal styling AI app

AMINA AFAQ
BENGALURU, 29 JAN

Do you struggle to pick the right outfits for work or party? Worry not, because a 19-year-old student from Bengaluru and three of his friends have created a virtual stylist app called WardrobeAI. The app acts as a personalised stylist that gives outfit suggestions.

First, you have to take photographs of all your clothes and upload them on the app. The app will then create a virtual wardrobe. Then, if you have a party to attend you could just ask the app: "What should I wear to a party with a red dress code?" The app will suggest combinations that work well for the party. It also takes into consideration of the weather and season of the user's city while choosing the outfits.

The app, which uses artificial intelligence, is developed by Amal Palackal, a student of Greenwood High International School in Sarjapur, Bengaluru; Nandha Sankar from San Francisco State University; Richard Wong, a Boston University student and Josie Chu from New York University.

Amal was inspired to create it after one of his educational videos on AI apps that he made for his previous start-up Teegle went viral on TikTok. He had created Teegle, a Reddit-like educational platform that enables learning anywhere after he missed a lot of school days due to asthma. Unfortunately, Teegle shut down after the AI boom. "I was disheartened after Teegle's failure but I did not give up. I used the coding that I learnt for two years to create Teegle to develop WardrobeAI in just two weeks," Amal said.

What sets WardrobeAI apart from other similar apps is the AI.In WardrobeAI, the AI analyses clothes and automatically fills out details such as colour, material and type. It personalises the style and recommendations according to the user's taste. The app also has a shopping recommendation feature that is integrated with e-commerce platforms such as Amazon. To complete your outfit, the app also gives suggestion on how to add accessories such as shoes and jewellery.The app was launched in October 2023 for IOS and has over 400 users from eight countries with over 1,000 garments uploaded to virtual wardrobes. The team is looking forward to launching the Android version soon with some new features. Meanwhile, Android users can use the website version of the application. "WardrobeAI aims to be the place where the world finds what it wears and buys," said Nandha, the marketing head.Amal, wants to build the next generational tech company that deals with data privatisation as he believes that a user has a right to privacy and current Silicon Valley companies could do a better job with regards to it. *—Salar News*

WardrobeAI developers, Amal Palackal; Josie Choo; Nandha Sankar; and Richard Wong *PHOTO: SALAR*

PHOTO: X

SC turns down AP govt's plea against Chandrababu Naidu

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

The Supreme Court on Monday dismissed a plea of the Andhra Pradesh government challenging the anticipatory bail granted to TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu in the Amaravati Inner Ring Road scam case. A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta dismissed the plea of the state government in which it has challenged the high court order of 10 January giving relief to Naidu. The bench noted that an appeal in the case arising from the same FIR involving other accused, was already dismissed by the court last year. It said in view of the earlier order passed by this court, the bench is not inclined to entertain the appeal of the state government. The Inner Ring Road scam case pertains to manipulating the master plan of Amaravati capital city, alignment of Inner Ring Road and the seed capital to allegedly offer undue enrichment to several companies during Naidu's tenure as chief minister.—*PTI*

SC extends time for disqualification of NCP MLAs

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

The Supreme Court on Monday extended the deadline for Maharashtra Assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar to decide the Sharad Pawar faction's plea seeking disqualification of NCP MLAs belonging to the bloc led by Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar till 15 February. The top court had on 30 October last year directed the speaker to decide the petition of Jayant Patil of the Sharad Pawar faction of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) seeking disqualification of the nine MLAs of the Ajit Pawar group by 31 January, 2024.On the same day, it had also directed the speaker to decide the cross-petitions filed by the rival factions of the Shiv Sena seeking disqualification of each other's MLAs by 31December.Solicitor General Tushar Mehta referred to the recent order passed by the speaker on the disqualification petition filed by the Sharad Pawar faction.—*PTI*

Slain MLA's son to contest Arunachal assembly polls

ITANAGAR, 29 JAN

Yangsen Matey, son of former Khonsa West MLA Yumsem Matey said he will contest the assembly polls from his father's constituency.Assembly elections in Arunachal Pradesh are due this year. Yangsen's father represented the Khonsa West seat in Tirap district. Yangsen, who recently joined the Bharatiya Janata Party on Sunday said he is hopeful that he will get the party ticket to contest the assembly polls. Twenty-nine-year-old Yangsen said, "I want to unite the people, especially Noctes and Ollos. I want to shed the political differences among the people and bring them together, which was my father's dream also." He appealed to people not to fight against each other due to political and ideological differences. —*PTI*

Senthil sought to defer trial to 'stall' proceedings: ED

CHENNAI, 29 JAN

ED on Monday submitted before a sessions court here on Monday that arrested Tamil Nadu minister V Senthil Balaji had sought deferring of the trial in a money laundering case "to stall further proceedings." Balaji had last week filed the petition before the court of the Principal Sessions Judge (PSJ), submitting that the Special Court for trial of criminal offences against MP/MLAs had not even taken cognizance of the alleged predicate/ scheduled offence till date. ED on Monday said that "The relief "deferment of the trial" does not fall under section 309 Cr.P.C."—*PTI*

Rahul slams Centre over 'de-reservation' row

Congress is now demanding withdrawal of UGC guidelines

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

Stepping up attack, the Congress on Monday demanded the dismissal of UGC Chairman M Jagadesh Kumar over the draft guidelines for "de-reservation" of posts in higher education institutions, with party leader Rahul Gandhi alleging it was a "conspiracy" to end the reservation given to SC, ST and OBC categories.

The party had on Sunday demanded the immediate withdrawal of the UGC's draft guidelines proposing that any vacancy reserved for SC, ST and OBC candidates can be "declared unreserved" if enough candidates from these categories are not available.

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, however, has clarified that not a single post will be de-reserved and there is no scope for ambiguity about reservations after the introduction of the Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Teachers' Cadre) Act, 2019.

Rahul Gandhi said Congress will continue to fight for social justice PHOTO: PTI

In a post in Hindi on X, Gandhi claimed it was an attempt by BJP and RSS to "eliminate" the participation of deprived sections and the party demanded that Kumar should apologise to the entire backward classes.

"In the new draft of UGC, there is a conspiracy to end the reservation given to SC, ST and OBC categories in higher education institutions.

"Today, out of approximately 7000 reserved posts in 45 central universities, 3000 are vacant, and of which only 7.1 per cent are Dalit, 1.6 per cent are tribal and 4.5 per cent are backward class professors.

"The BJP-RSS, which have even talked about reviewing reservation, now want to snatch the jobs of the deprived classes from such higher education institutions," Gandhi alleged.

- Gandhi said this was the difference between 'politics of symbolism' and 'real justice' and reflected the character of the BJP. He said Congress will never allow this to happen

Gandhi said this was the difference between 'politics of symbolism' and 'real justice' and reflected the character of the BJP.

He said Congress will never allow this to happen and will continue to fight for social justice. —*PTI*

Stalin: Celebrate 30 Jan as communal harmony day

CHENNAI, 29 JAN

The death anniversary of Gandhiji on 30 January should be observed as religious harmony day, DMK President and Chief Minister MK Stalin has appealed to his party workers and the people across the country.

Slamming the Right wing, Stalin said the 'anger of communal elements' against Mahatma Gandhi has not subsided even 75 years after his death.

Governor RN Ravi's comment that the "nation did not attain independence due to Gandhi" only reflected malice, the ruling party chief alleged in a statement on Sunday night.Stalin's allegation comes days after Ravi said an 'erroneous impression' was created on his statement on Gandhiji. The Governor, on 27 January had said that he had only tried to 'make a point' that the revolt of the Royal Indian Navy and Air Force in February, 1946, inspired by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, accelerated the pace and process of Independence.

"I hold Mahatma Gandhi in the highest regard and his teachings have been the ideals of my life." The Governor had made that statement on the occasion of the 127th birth anniversary of Subhas Bose on 23 January. "...some media did cherry-picking from my speech and gave it a twist."

- Slamming the Right wing, Stalin said the 'anger of communal elements' against Mahatma Gandhi has not subsided even 75 years after his death

The Chief Minister alleged efforts to 'damage pluralism' by 'besmirching Gandhiji's reputation.' The BJP-led Centre picking January 30 to mark the Swachh Bharat Abiyan (National Cleanliness Day) was 'sabotage.' The RSS tried to 'divert' attention by choosing 2 October (last year) to hold its marches. However, it was not allowed by the government led by him. —*PTI*

HAPPY FACES

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin with Serbian tennis player Novak Djokovic onboard a flight to Spain —PHOTO: PTI

Lalu appears before ED in 'lands-for-jobs' case

PATNA, 29 JAN

Rashtriya Janata Dal chief Lalu Prasad on Monday appeared before the Enforcement Directorate (ED) for questioning in connection with the central agency's money laundering probe into the alleged land-for-jobs scam, officials said.

The RJD Supremo, accompanied by his daughter Misa Bharti, reached the ED office here around 11.05am, they said.

Talking to reporters, before entering the ED office, Bharti said, "Whenever any agency calls our family members for questioning..., we go there, cooperate with them and answer all their queries. Because of his health condition, it is difficult for him (Prasad) to move on his own. Someone has to accompany him whenever he goes somewhere. The questioning is still on."

The ED has issued summons to Lalu on 19 January after he failed to turn up on earlier dates PHOTO: PTI

Prasad's Singapore-based daughter Rohini Achaya claimed that even after repeated requests by her sister Bharti, ED officials did not allow any assistant of the RJD Chief to enter the central agency's office and accompany him.

"Everyone knows about the health condition of my father...he can't even walk without support. Despite that ED officials did not allow any assistant to enter their office and accompany him. It's inhuman behaviour by ED officials...shame on you (ED officals) and your boss (top ED officials)," Acharya wrote on X in Hindi. —*PTI*

'BJP THREATENING PEOPLE WITH ED IF THEY DON'T VOTE'

COOCH BEHAR, 29 JAN

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday accused the BJP of threatening people to send central probe agencies to their homes if they do not vote for the saffron party in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

The TMC supremo advised locals in Cooch Behar, particularly Rajbanshis, to ensure that their names are on the voters' list to "protect themselves" from the Citizenship (Amendment) Act or CAA.

"The BJP is using central agencies for elections... it is threatening people over the phone to send Enforcement Directorate (ED) and Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) sleuths to their homes if they do not vote for the saffron party," Banerjee said at a public distribution programme here.

The West Bengal chief minister also asserted that she will not follow any diktat of the BJP to worship any particular god.

"I follow Ramayana, Quran, Bible and Guru Granth Sahib... I do not do drama by visiting poor people's homes to eat food brought from outside," she said.Banerjee alleged that the Centre is bringing up the issue of CAA to do politics before the Lok Sabha polls.Earlier in the day, Union minister and BJP leader Shantanu Thakur claimed that the CAA will be implemented across India within the next seven days. —*PTI*

'Nitish's return to NDA will have no impact on INDIA'

KISHANGANJ/ARARIA , 29 JAN

A day after Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar ditched the 'Mahagathbandhan' to return to the BJP-led NDA, Congress leader Jairam Ramesh on Monday claimed that the JD(U) supremo's exit will have "absolutely no impact" on the opposition bloc INDIA.

Interacting with reporters in Kishanganj during the Congress' 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra', Ramesh mocked Kumar, saying 'Aaya Kumar, Gaya Kumar'.

Speaking on Kumar allying with the BJP-led NDA, he said, "It will not have any impact on the INDIA alliance... absolutely no impact. This is typical of Nitish Kumar. It is not 'Aaya Ram, Gaya Ram', it is 'Aaya Kumar, Gaya Kumar'."

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh. PHOTO: PTI

The Congress leader also alleged that "Kumar's betrayal" was "masterminded by the prime minister"."When 'Bharat Jodo Nayay Yatra' started on January 14 from Manipur's Thoubal, PM Modi found the 'muhurat' to sway Milind Deora from the Congress so that the headlines become 'Milind Deora' instead of 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra'," he alleged.

"They (BJP) were stressed with Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra's entry to Bihar. So, they asked the 'flipping master' (referring to Nitish Kumar) to do a flip... and he did that," he said.

Ramesh claimed that the Congress received a tremendous response from the people of Kishanganj after the 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' reached the district this morning.Interacting with reporters in Araria, Ramesh, said, "A large number of people participated in the padayatra in Araria... people of Bihar are welcoming the yatra with great enthusiasm. Like Assam and Bengal, the yatra is getting a great response in Bihar too.""BJP leaders sitting in Delhi and conspiring to stop the yatra must understand that this yatra is not going to stop until people get their right to justice. People are fed up with the 10-year rule of the BJP-led NDA government Ramesh said. —*PTI*

NHRC notice to T'gana over cops 'dragging' student by hair

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has sent a notice to the Telangana government and the state's police Chief over media reports that some policewomen allegedly dragged a female student by her hair during an agitation by some students in Ranga Reddy district, officials said on Monday.NHRC has sought a detailed report, including details of action taken against the police officials responsible for the alleged incident, within four weeks, the rights panel said in a statement.It has taken suo motu cognisance of a report on a video clip purportedly showing policewomen "dragging a protesting student by her hair in Ranga Reddy district of Telangana during an agitation by some students of the Professor Jayashankar Telangana State Agricultural University (PJTSAU) on 24 January, 2024," it said.Accordingly, it has issued notices to the Chief Secretary and the director general of police of Telangana, seeking a report on the incident within four weeks. —*PTI*

Oppn boycotts Kerala Assembly over pension

T'PURAM, 29 JAN

The Congress-led opposition UDF on Monday boycotted proceedings of the Kerala Assembly after the Speaker refused to grant leave for an adjournment motion concerning the "non-disbursal" of social security pensions in the state.Congress MLA PC Vishnunath, in a motion seeking adjournment, claimed that the failure to distribute social security pensions led to the recent suicide of Joseph, a resident of Kozhikode.

Finance Minister KN Balagopal expressed regret over the suicide and dismissed the allegation that it was linked to the non-disbursal of social security pensions.

T he opposition staged a protest in front of his dais for almost 30 minutes PHOTO: PTI

"The person died by suicide on 23 January. He had received his pension for the months of November and December. There is no evidence suggesting that his suicide was due to the non-disbursal of pension," Balagopal told the Assembly.Moving the motion, Vishnunath highlighted that the Left government had implemented a cess of Rs two per litre of fuel in the state to fund social security pension but had failed in its distribution.Following the Speaker's refusal to entertain the notice, the opposition staged a protest in front of his dais for almost 30 minutes before ultimately boycotting the proceedings.Addressing the media outside the Assembly, Leader of Opposition in the state Assembly, VD Satheesan said the non-disbursal of the pension was affecting over 50 lakh people and demanded that the government ensure its clearance by February. —*PTI*

- Finance Minister N Balagopal expressed regret over the suicide and dismissed allegation. that it was linked to non-disbursal of social security pensions

MP Cong leaders scuffle over poll ticket

BHOPAL, 29 JAN

Two Madhya Pradesh Congress leaders on Monday engaged in a scuffle in the party's headquarters here, videos of which went viral on social media, prompting BJP to claim internal disputes in the grand old party had got intense.

In the videos, Pradeep Ahirwar, a former president of the MP Congress' Scheduled Caste department, and part Spokesperson Shaharyar Khan can be seen arguing over ticket distribution in the November Assembly polls, hurling abuses and then scuffling, during the course of which the latter was pushed to the ground.

The incident occurred on the premises of the Congress' state headquarters.Sources said the argument started after Ahirwar accused senior leader and MP Digvijaya Singh of mistakes in ticket distribution. —*PTI*

Will submit UCC draft on 2 Feb: Dhami

DEHRADUN, 29 JAN

Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami said the draft of the Uniform Civil Code will be submitted to the government on Friday and a bill on the code brought in the Assembly session beginning 5 February to implement it in the state.A committee headed by former Supreme Court judge Ranjana Prakash Desai was formed by the Dhami government in 2022 to prepare a draft UCC for Uttarakhand, which could become the first state to have one - barring Goa which inherited a common code from the Portuguese at the time of Liberation.In a post on X, Dhami said, "The committee formed to prepare the draft of the Uniform Civil Code will submit its draft to the state government on 2 February and we will implement (UCC) in the state by bringing a bill in the upcoming assembly polls. —*PTI*

TONGUE IN CHEEK

'Paltu Chacha' Nitish sparks meme fest online

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

Nitish Kumar was the subject, social media the platform and levity the mood for many who used wordplay, snappy one-liners and cartoons to lampoon the Bihar chief minister for forming a new government with the BJP in another political somersault.

'Paltu Chacha', 'Paltu Putra' and 'Paltu Ram'... the names were many. As political pundits analysed the JD-U chief's latest move, humour in its many shades rolled out on Whatsapp, X, Facebook and Instagram with netizens putting on their comic caps, referencing the corporate world, cinema and cricket to make their points.

"He Nitished me" went the 'translation' for "Usne mujhe dokha diya" in a WhatsApp forward, the wordplay turning the veteran politician's name into a verb. A new coinage as it were for 'cheating'.

PHOTO: PTI

Tongue firmly in cheek, a post on X by the handle Kungfu Pande listed five corporate lessons. "Work like Nitish kumar, Love your job, not your company," it said.

"5. Always be flexible. 4. Switch at the right time. 3. Never burn the bridges. 2. Be open to join the company again. Last but not the least... 1. Never quit without another offer in the hand," the post read.

Kumar on Sunday resigned as chief minister of Bihar, saying "things were not working well" for him in the 'Mahagathbandhan' and the opposition bloc INDIA. In his fifth switch in over a decade, he formed a new government with the BJP, a party he had dumped 18 months ago, and was sworn in as chief minister of the state for the ninth time.

Journalist Madhavan Narayanan suggested a cricket tournament format with a minor tweak in the rule of the game, also there were several funny movie allusions. —*PTI*

5 killed, 1 critical in Telangana car accident

HYDERABAD, 29 JAN

Five members of a family, including two children, died while another suffered serious injuries after the car in which they were travelling was involved in a collision with a speeding lorry in Nalgonda district of Telangana, police said on Monday. The mishap occurred when all the family members were returning to their village in the district in a car late Sunday night after a visit to neighbouring Andhra Pradesh. The car was hit by the lorry coming in the opposite direction on the highway near Miryalguda in the district. The driver of the car tried to avoid hitting a dog but ended up landing on the other side of the highway, they said. While five people died on the spot, a woman was injured. She was admitted to a hospital and her condition was said to be critical, police said, adding that the lorry driver was nabbed. *—PTI*

Woman files case against husband for hiding impotency

THANE, 29 JAN

A 32-year-old woman in Thane has filed a police complaint of cheating and cruelty against her husband after he allegedly did not inform her that he was undergoing treatment for impotency, an official said on Monday. The couple tied the knot on 8 June last year in Nashik. The woman in her complaint said sometime after their marriage, she stumbled upon medical documents revealing that her 40-year-old husband was undergoing treatment for impotency, the official from Khadakpada police station said. Upon confrontation, the man confessed to concealing about his medical condition before getting married, the woman said in her complaint. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

2 dead after choking on smoke from coal stove in Delhi

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

A woman and her two-year-old son died here of suffocation after inhaling smoke from a coal stove lit in the room they were sleeping in, police said on Monday. Her husband and her two other children are being treated at the Safdarjung hospital. On Sunday at 6.16 am, police were informed about their condition and they were rushed to the hospital from South Delhi's Maidan Garhi area, officials said.

Anjali, 23, and her son Shambhu died during treatment, they said. Dinesh, Divansh, 6, and Devanshi, 4, are hospitalised. Police said it is suspected that smoke from the coal brazier, or "angithi", filled the unventilated room in the intervening night Saturday and Sunday. The family lived in a rented accommodation in Asola, police said and added that it has been their residence for the last two years. *—PTI*

UP govt teacher locked, burnt alive inside room

KANPUR, 29 JAN

A 48-year-old government college teacher died after he was allegedly locked in a room and set on fire in the Panki area of Kanpur in Uttar Pradesh. The incident happened Sunday.

The teacher, Dayaram, called his younger brother Anuj on the phone and informed him that one Sanjeev and his aides had locked him in a room in the Patrasa village and set it on fire. Anuj rushed to the spot with police but by the time they could open the door, Dayaram had succumbed to burns. Police have detained Sanjeev for questioning. Deputy Commissioner of Police (West) Vijay Dhul inspected the incident site. "The charred body of the teacher was found in a room. His brother has accused four people, including his sister-in-law and her male friend of murder," he said.*—IANS*

Parents shouldn't treat child's report card as visiting card: PM

He said parents, teachers must tackle challenges faced by students

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday said it is crucial to instil resilience in children to help them cope with pressures and asserted that parents and teachers should collectively address challenges faced by students.

Interacting with students, parents and teachers during his annual Pariksha Pe Charcha programme, Modi advised parents against treating their child's report card as their own visiting card and suggested that students should compete with themselves and not others.

Modi also suggested students to "always make friends who are more intelligent and work harder". "You must be inspired by such friends. Don't let the pressure of studies and examinations overpower you," he said.

Modi said that even though competition and challenges act as inspirations but competition must be healthy.

Modi explained that the stress faced by students is of three types --induced by peer pressure, by parents and self-induced.

The Prime Minister said that challenges of students must be addressed collectively by parents and teachers.

He also encouraged teachers to forge strong connections with their students.

"The bond between educators and learners is the foundation for a bright future. If teachers start working on building a relationship with their students from the first day of the year, there won't be any question of tension building up among students at the time of examinations," he said.

Replying to questions on balancing studies with a healthy life, Prime Minister Modi said many students use mobile-phones and some do it for many hours. He advised students not to use their

—PTI

Narendra Modi interacts with students during the 'Pariksha Pe Charcha' **PHOTO: PTI**

I can't do JEE, I am a loser: Kota girl kills self

KOTA, 29 JAN

An 18-year-old student preparing for JEE allegedly hanged herself at her home in this coaching hub on Monday, leaving behind a suicide note saying sorry to her parents and calling herself a "loser".

"Mummy, papa I can't do JEE. So I suicide," the note scrawled in English said. She was to give the JEE test in a day or two.

"I am loser. I am worst daughter. Sorry mummy papa. Yahi last option he," the note found in Niharika Singh's room added. This was the second suspected suicide in Kota in less than a week.

The suicide was reported on a day Prime Minister Narendra Modi held his annual interaction with students preparing for their school board exams, asking them and their parents not to let competition get to them.

The student was the eldest of three sisters. Her father is a security guard at a private bank in Kota. The family hails from Akawdakhurd village in Jhalawar and has been staying in the city for the last three years.

Her cousin said Niharika was under severe stress over the upcoming JEE test. She had to repeat her 12th class exam because she got a low score, the relative told reporters.

However, according to him, she was good at studies and devoted seven or eight hours every day to them.

Last year, 26 students allegedly committed suicide in Kota, where children come from across the country to prepare for competitive tests like the National Entrance Exam (JEE) for admission to top engineering colleges.

On 23 January, 19-year-old Mohammed Zaid was found hanging in his hostel room in Kota. . *—PTI*

SC extends stay on survey of Shahi Idgah

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

Supreme Court on Monday ordered continuance of the interim stay on the operation of Allahabad High Court order for a court-monitored survey of the Shahi Idgah Mosque complex adjoining the Krishna Janmabhoomi temple in Mathura.

A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta posted the plea filed by the Committee of Management Trust Shahi Masjid Idgah for further hearing in the first half of April.

The top court said all petitions pending before it on the issue will be taken up for hearing together in April.

The top court had on 16 January stayed the operation of the 14 December, 2023 order of Allahabad High Court which allowed a court-monitored survey of Shahi Idgah Mosque complex.

It had also stayed the order of the High Court by which it agreed to the appointment of a court commissioner to oversee the survey of the mosque premises, which the Hindu side claims hold signs suggesting that it was once a temple.

The apex court, however, made it clear that the proceedings before the high court in the dispute, including the maintainability of the suit under Order 7 Rule 11 of the Civil Procedure Code (CPC), will continue.

It had said there are certain legal issues which have arisen and questioned the "vague" application made before the high court for appointment of a court commissioner for the survey.

The top court had issued notice to the Hindu bodies and sought their response on the Mosque committee's plea.

The mosque committee, in its plea, has submitted that High Court ought to have considered its petition challenging the maintainability of the suit before deciding any related miscellaneous applications.

The committee had sought rejection of the plea on the grounds that the lawsuit is barred by the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991, which puts a bar on change of character of religious places after 15 August, 1947. The Ram temple in Ayodhya was the only exception to the 1991 law. While allowing the plea for a court-monitored survey, High Court had said no harm should be caused to the Mathura structure during the exercise. *—PTI*

Ker rejects Oppn's charge on shortage of drugs in hospitals

T'PURAM, 29 JAN

Kerala government on Monday dismissed the Opposition's allegation of shortage of medicines in government hospitals, stating that medicines under the essential drug list are available in all hospitals.

Health Minister Veena George, in response to a query by Opposition UDF MLA and Kerala Congress (Jacob) leader, Anoop Jacob in the state Assembly, said that the state government has ensured the availability of medicines in all government hospitals through Kerala Medical Services Corporation Ltd (KMSCL).

"In fact, in certain cases the KMSCL has supplied more medicines than the purchase indent submitted by the hospitals," the minister told the Assembly.

Jacob cited various news reports alleging shortage of medicines in various government hospitals across the state. He also alleged that government hospitals were referring patients to outside laboratories and pharmacies and sought a reply from the government. George said that Jacob's statement was generalised and misleading and sought to withdraw it. She claimed in the Assembly that the state government has distributed medicines worth Rs 554 crore in the current year till January. *—PTI*

THE BEAUTY OF DELHI

Camel mounted Border Security Force (BSF) personnel during the Beating Retreat ceremony, at Vijay Chowk in New Delhi on Monday **PHOTO: PTI**

SC asks Guj HC to train magistrates

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

Having termed as "grossest of contempt" the police remand of a businessman granted anticipatory bail, Supreme Court said it will ask Gujarat High Court to impart proper training to magistrates.

Voicing extreme displeasure over the police remand of the Gujarat-based businessman, the apex court had on 10 January issued notice to some police officials and a judicial magistrate of Surat on a contempt petition filed by the man.

The top court was informed it had on 8 December last year granted anticipatory bail to petitioner Tusharbhai Rajnikantbhai Shah but he was remanded in police custody from 13 to 16 December, 2023, in a cheating case.

The matter came up for hearing again on Monday by a bench of Justices BR Gavai and Sandeep Mehta.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for some of the respondents, said they had committed a "mistake".

"This is not something which can be defended or should be defended. The real reason is, this is clearly a case of mistake," he told the bench.

The bench observed that the apex court's December 8, 2023 order granting anticipatory bail to Shah was clear and it was also placed before the magistrate and the police officials concerned.

Mehta told the bench that the police officer who "misread" the order of the apex court has been placed under suspension.

He said the Surat Commissioner of Police was not initially aware about the order passed by the top court.

—PTI

Panel on women marriage age bill gets more time

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

A parliamentary committee examining a bill seeking to raise the age of marriage of women from the present 18 years to 21 has been given another extension to table its report.

The Budget session of Parliament beginning 31 January is the last session of the present Lok Sabha before parliamentary elections are announced.

The committee will now finalise its report by May following the four-month extension while the term of the 17th Lok Sabha ends on 16 June.

The Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021, which was introduced in the Lok Sabha and remains pending there, is likely to lapse when the tenure of the House ends in June.

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Bills introduced in the Lok Sabha and pending there as well as those passed by the Rajya Sabha and pending in the lower house lapse on the dissolution of the Lok Sabha.

The committee has been given extensions to finalise its report in the past too.

The Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021 was introduced in the Lok Sabha in December 2021 and was referred to the standing committee on Education, Women, Children, Youth and Sports which functions under the Rajya Sabha Secretariat.

Soon after introducing the bill, Women and Child Development Minister Smriti Irani had requested the Lok Sabha speaker to refer the bill to the standing committee for detailed examination. *—PTI*

Pleas against me not maintainable: Dhoni

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

MS Dhoni PHOTO: PTI

Former Team India cricket captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni submitted before Delhi High Court that a defamation plea filed against him by his two ex-business partners was not maintainable.

High Court refused to pass any interim order, at this stage, against Dhoni and several media houses and social media platforms to injunct them from posting or publishing any alleged false defamatory content against the plaintiffs on any platform which could tarnish their goodwill and reputation. Plaintiffs and former business partners Mihir Diwakar and his wife Soumya Das have approached High Court seeking a permanent injunction and damages against Dhoni, several social media platforms and media houses and thereby restraining them from making, publishing, circulating per se defamatory, ex facie false and malicious statements against them. Dhoni's counsel appeared before the court and submitted that the plaint against him was not maintainable and he has just filed a case against the couple in a Ranchi court.

—PTI

Teacher says 'don't believe in Hindu gods', suspended

BILASPUR, 29 JAN

A 60-year-old headmaster of a government school in Chhattisgarh's Bilaspur district has been arrested for allegedly hurting religious sentiments. He allegedly administered a pledge to people not to believe in Hindu gods and to embrace Buddhism, police said on Monday.

The incident took place on 22 January, following which the district education officer suspended Ratalal Sarovar, who was posted as headmaster of a government primary school in Bharari village, an official said.

On 22 January, when the consecration of Ram Lalla's idol was held at the Ayodhya temple, Sarovar gathered a group of people including children in Mohtarai village under Ratanpur police station limits. He allegedly administered them a pledge not to worship Hindu gods, and to follow Buddhism, a police official said.

—PTI

Delhi boy forced to lick shoes, perform sex act by 'friends'

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

A 14-year-old boy was made to lick shoes and perform "unnatural sex" on three of his friends, who also recorded the act and put its video on social media, in south Delhi's Hauz Khas area, police said on Monday.

The incident came to fore Sunday, when one of the three juvenile assailants sent the video to the mother of the boy and she approached the local police, they said.

The video, also posted on Instagram, showed the boy being made to crouch at knife point, while his "friends" first made him lick their shoes and then forced him to perform an "unnatural act," police said.

They took the boy for a medical exam and then to counselling.

The officer said, according to the victim, he was on his way home on Saturday around 6.30 pm after playing at Central Park in Hauz Khas, when three of his friends, aged between 12 and 14 years, forced him to go with them to an isolated place.

"One of the accused pointed a vegetable knife and put his private part in his mouth. The trio also captured that act on their mobile phone," another officer said. The accused also threatened him of dire consequences if he told anyone about the act, the officer said. Out of fear, the boy hid his ordeal from his parents.

—PTI

A MUCH NEEDED RELIEF

Kashmir a heaven again as snow covers barren mountain lands

SRINAGAR, 29 JAN

Snowfall in Kashmir has brought cheers to the tourism sector, sparking joy among tourists and the local people linked with the tourism industry.

The industry was feeling battered over the last couple of months in the absence of a good snowfall, with many intending tourists cancelling their bookings and tour operators receiving little to no queries.

The tourist arrivals to the valley, which usually witnesses a higher footfall, especially at resorts like Gulmarg, fell in the absence of snow - a cause of worry for the tourism stakeholders in the valley.

However, the snowfall at the fag-end of Chilla-i-Kalan -- a 40-day harsh winter period when the chances of snowfall are maximum and most frequent -- has brought cheers to both the tourists as well as the tourism players.

Hundreds of tourists, including children, have been enjoying the snowfall at Gulmarg and Sonamarg resorts.

Mohammad Imran, a tourist from Nagpur in Maharashtra said he returned to the Gulmarg resort again after the snowfall.

Aryan, a young tourist from Bengaluru who has come to Kashmir with his parents and sister, said it was a great feeling. "It feels so good. It looks like heaven," he said, enjoying the snowfall.

Ankit Makane, a part of a 15-member tourist group from Mumbai, enjoyed playing in the snow at Sonamarg. "It feels truly and literally like heaven. Kashmir is so beautiful and the people here are really amazing. We enjoyed a lot," he said. It is not only the tourists who are cheered up, the snowfall has sparked joy among the local tourism players as well.

Another stakeholder, Abdul Rashid, said the livelihoods of private service providers were affected due to a prolonged dry spell over the last two months, but the snowfall has come as a blessing. Meanwhile, authorities have issued advisories to tourists and locals visiting places like Sonamarg and Gulmarg.

—PTI

People stand at a snow covered field after light snowfall at Tangmarg in Baramulla district of north Kashmir **PHOTO: PTI**

COLOURS OF JOY

Boats sail as confetti explodes in the air during the traditional rowing parade, part of the Venice Carnival in Venice. This year's edition 'To the East, the amazing journey of Marco Polo' pays homage to Marco Polo, a venetian merchant on the occasion of the 700th anniversary of his death. ***PHOTO: PTI***

Israel rejects 2-state solution, conflict prevails

ISRAEL-GAZA WAR

Palestinians look at the destruction after an Israeli strike in Rafah, southern Gaza Strip ***PHOTO: AP***

The growing rift between the Biden administration and the Netanyahu government over Israel's war in Gaza is now in the open, with public disagreement between them on the viability of a two-state solution to the conflict.

US President Joe Biden literally embraced Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu within days of Hamas' horrific attack in southern Israel on 7 October, and the US has steadfastly protected Israel's interests in the UN Security Council.

But tensions have mounted as the civilian death toll from Israel's massive retaliation in Gaza has climbed to more than 25,000 – 70 per cent of whom are women and children.

To put that in context, more non-combatants have been killed in less than four months in Gaza than in nearly two years of war in Ukraine, where the civilian death toll only recently exceeded 10,000.

Biden warned in December that Israel was losing international support over its "indiscriminate bombing" of Gaza. The administration has also made clear through background media briefings its concern that Netanyahu has no postwar plan for Gaza's governance.

And following the preliminary order issued by the International Court of Justice in the genocide case against Israel this past weekend, White House commentary made clear the court's orders aligned with US policy. Specifically, the court said Israel must take all possible steps to minimise civilian harm and increase the flow of humanitarian assistance to Gaza.With criticism of Israel mounting on the global stage, the Biden administration has inserted the United States' long-standing support for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In response, Netanyahu has thrown down the gauntlet – flatly rejecting the creation of a separate Palestinian state. He posted on X: "I will not compromise on full Israeli security control over the entire area in the west of Jordan – and this is contrary to a Palestinian state".

Butting heads with US presidentsThis rift between the two leaders should not be a surprise. Netanyahu is Israel's longest-serving Prime Minister and has the self-belief that goes with 16 years in office.

This is not the first time he has butted heads with a US President. In particular, he had a poisonous relationship with Barack Obama, notably visiting Washington to address a joint sitting of Congress in 2015 without bothering to call on the president – an extraordinary breach of protocol.

Despite the fact the Oslo Accords of 1993 and 1995, signed by former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, laid down a pathway to the creation of a Palestinian state, Netanyahu has never hidden his opposition to the concept.In a recently published profile of Netanyahu in the New Yorker, David Remnick describes how the Israeli leader made a speech in 2009 in which he "conveyed a wary and highly conditional openness to a Palestinian state". The conditions included:

- Palestinian recognition of Israel as a Jewish state
- no return of Palestinian refugees outside Israel
- The demilitarisation of a future Palestinian state and Jerusalem remaining the united capital of Israel.

None of these was likely to be acceptable to Palestinians.

Remnick comments the speech was a tactical move, with a larger goal in mind. He quotes the reaction of then-US ambassador to Israel, Martin Indyk: "We met a day or two after the speech. [Netanyahu] was all puffed up, and he said to me, 'All right, I said it, now can we get back to dealing with Iran?'"

Is Biden or Netanyahu right?

This leads to the current – and more important – question: who is right about the future viability of a two-state solution, Biden or Netanyahu?

Putting aside questions of equity and morality, analysis of the evidence suggests the answer is Netanyahu.

The simple fact is the number of Israeli settlers in the occupied West Bank (including East Jerusalem) – now about 700,000, who live alongside three million Palestinians – means there is not much space left for a Palestinian state.

That gap is narrowing, with population growth higher among settlers than Palestinians. Ultra-Orthodox Jews, who comprise one-third of the settlers, have a fertility rate in Israel of 6.5 live births per woman. The current fertility rate among Palestinians is around 3.8 births per woman. If this trend continues, by mid-century, the Israeli-Palestinian population in the West Bank could be equal.The only way space could be made for another state would be if the government were to dismantle the settlements and direct the settlers to live within the borders that existed before Israel seized the West Bank in the 1967 Six-Day War.Despite the fact the settlements are illegal under international law – they violate the Fourth Geneva Convention.

—Courtesy, The Conversation

SALAR ساڈا بنگلور

Now Haji Malang is in the middle of religious row

A Sufi shrine frequented by Indians of all faiths made headlines recently after a top political leader said that he wanted to "liberate" it for just Hindus. The BBC's Cherylann Mollan visited to understand what the controversy was about.

The ascent is no easy feat, with some 1,500 rock-cut steps separating the devout from their destination: a Sufi saint's tomb that has become a seat of faith, legend and disputed history.

The Haji Malang dargah (shrine), sitting on a hill on the outskirts of Mumbai in the western state of Maharashtra, is said to house the tomb of an Arab missionary who came to India more than 700 years ago. Like many other Sufi shrines across India, the dargah is seen as a symbol of assimilation and tolerance, despite being at the centre of a religious dispute.

When I visited, both Hindus and Muslims were offering flowers and a chadar - a piece of cloth offered as a symbol of respect in Sufi traditions - at the saint's tomb. The belief is that any wish asked for with a "pure heart" will be granted.

The shrine's managing board mirrors this sense of respectful co-existence - while two of its trustees are Muslims, its hereditary custodians are from a Hindu Brahmin family.

But earlier this month, Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde stirred controversy by reviving a decades-old claim at a political rally. He asserted that the structure, traditionally considered a dargah, was a temple belonging to Hindus, and declared his commitment to "liberating" it.

Shinde did not respond to the BBC's request for comment.

His claim comes at a time when some prominent mosques and Muslim-made monuments in India are mired in disputes over claims that they were constructed by demolishing Hindu temples centuries ago.

In the 1980s, Shinde's political mentor, Anand Dighe, spearheaded a campaign to "reclaim" the Haji Malang dargah for Hindus. In 1996, he reportedly led 20,000 workers from the Shiv Sena party inside the dargah to perform a pooja (a Hindu act of worship).

Since then, Hindu hardliners, who refer to the structure as Malanggad, have continued the practice of performing pooja at the shrine on full Moon days, occasionally leading to clashes with Muslim devotees and locals.

But political observers say that Mr Shinde's stance may have less to do with faith and more to do with optics. Dighe's campaign had bumped up his appeal among Hindu voters in Maharashtra state.

"Shinde is now trying to position himself as the 'Hindu saviour' of Maharashtra," says Prashant Dixit, a former journalist.

Separate from the national election, Maharashtra - India's wealthiest state - will vote for the state assembly later this year. Securing support from the Hindu majority is crucial for Shinde, given the state's distinctive political landscape, says Dixit.

Elections in Maharashtra are usually a four-way contest between the nativist, Hindu nationalist Shiv Sena and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the centrist Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and Congress, each with their own share of core voters.

But Shinde faces an additional complication - in 2022, he and his supporters defected from the erstwhile Shiv Sena.

The rebellion toppled the then-triparty government - an unlikely coalition of the Shiv Sena, Congress and NCP - and forged a new alliance with the BJP to form the new government.

"But while lawmakers might change parties, it's hard to get core voters to switch loyalties," Dixit says. "By raising the dargah issue, Shinde is hoping to appeal to the emotions of the core voters of the erstwhile Shiv Sena and consolidate the Hindu vote bank," he says.

Hindu devotees the BBC spoke to had mixed reactions to Shinde's comments.

Kushal Misl, for instance, sees Shinde as articulating what has long been on his mind - a belief that the shrine originally belonged to a Hindu saint and was later taken over by Muslims during invasions in India.

Rajendra Gaikwad shares a similar view but says that he feels uneasy about the ongoing debate. "Whatever is happening in India right now is very bad," he says, and underscores his belief that for him, "all gods are one".

Abhijit Nagare, who goes to the shrine every month, says that it doesn't matter to him which religion the structure belongs to - he likes to visit because he feels at peace there.Nasir Khan, one of the shrine's trustees, told the BBC that the controversy had led to a dip in the number of devotees visiting the shrine. "People come with their families and don't want to be hassled by miscreants," he said.

The controversy is also hurting local businesses. *—BBC News*

The Haji Malang dargah is said to be more than 700 years old ***PHOTO: PTI***

LETTERS Write to us at salar@salar.news

Nowhere to go for people of Sunderban as river eats away their land

Panchanan Dolui, who lives on Mousuni Island in the Indian Sundarbans, has shifted homes three times due to floods and river erosion.

Each time, he moves farther from the receding edge of the island to avoid displacement. He has watched the river eat away vast tracts of land. "Where do we go? There is nowhere to go," he laments.

Located in West Bengal state in eastern India and neighbouring Bangladesh, the Sundarbans forest system is a cluster of low-lying islands and represents the largest mangrove ecosystem in the world. It is home to several endangered species and acts as a natural barrier against cyclones, storm surges and other environmental hazards. The forests are also natural agents of carbon capture and sequestration.

But things are changing fast. Four cyclones that hit the eastern coast of India from 2019 to 2021 – Fani, Amphan, Bulbul and Yaas – point to the increasingly unpredictable weather in the Sundarbans caused by climate change and rising sea levels.

Now, the Sundarbans are increasingly "not safe for human habitation", says Kalyan Rudra, chairperson of the West Bengal Pollution Control Board.

The spate of recent cyclones has compounded climate-induced displacement that the people of the Sundarbans have confronted in previous decades. Lohachara was one of the first inhabited islands to disappear under the sea in 1996, forcing residents to relocate to neighbouring islands, often without documents or property deeds.

In the face of limited options for making a living and without sufficient development in the region, migration has become a coping strategy for many residents. There have been several waves of migration within the Sundarbans, often on the same island, to avoid flooding from embankment breaches, tidal bores and storm surges.Since Cyclone Aila in 2009, distress migration driven by economic vulnerability has resulted in men taking up work as informal migrant workers across India.Women-headed households in the Sundarbans are more common than in any other area of India because of distress migration. But these households are often marked by debt burdens, a high number of dependents and limited livelihood options.

Since Cyclone Aila in 2009, distress migration driven by economic vulnerability has resulted in men taking up work as informal migrant workers across India ***PHOTO: PTI***

Meanwhile, increasing land salinity due to severe cyclonic storms and tidal wave action, which carries seawater from the Bay of Bengal into the Sundarbans delta, impedes soil productivity.

Increased salinity forces farming changes

Salinity-resistant paddy farming is an important form of climate change adaptation in the area, and it has become increasingly popular over the past decade.Increased salinity, however, has also led to brackish water shrimp farming on a commercial scale, causing land degradation. The health of women who perform the poorly paid labour of prawn seed collection, which involves standing up to six hours in saltwater, is adversely affected. Increasing salinity is a leading cause of reproductive health problems among rural women in the Sundarbans, including pelvic inflammation and urinary tract infections. Increasing salinity has also led to a severely degraded mangrove ecosystem, affecting biodiversity and causing a loss of forest reserves that sustain local communities.

The ire of tigers

The pressure on forest resources also amplifies man-animal conflict in the area. The Sundarbans are home to tiger widows, women whose husbands went into the Sundarbans reserve for fishing or honey collection and were killed by tigers.There is no official recognition of such deaths because entry into the forest became illegal for its dwellers once the area was declared a tiger reserve in 1973 and came under the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972.Pradip Chatterjee, former president of the Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum or the South Bengal Fishers' Union, calls these tiger deaths "be-aini mrityu", or illegal deaths, marked by the erasure of the person's existence.He notes that the local police station refuses to make entries of the tiger deaths because of their "illegal" nature, hampering the process of applying for compensation – a bureaucratic labyrinth that requires the deceased's kin to produce a police report and death certificate. Recently, the Calcutta High Court acknowledged tiger deaths in a landmark decision, ordering the West Bengal Forest Department to pay full compensation to two tiger widows.

How the marginalised are sidelined

Continuing climate disasters not only slow down the recovery but also exacebate pre-existing vulnerabilities of caste and gender. For example, government relief after disasters is often selective and contingent on existing land holdings, such as after Cyclone Amphan.

Future hangs in the balance

In December, state capital Kolkata became one of the first claimants for climate change-induced loss and damage from the Loss and Damage Fund, which was agreed upon during the United Nations COP28 summit. The fund will include coverage for climate-displaced populations from the Sundarbans.

In response to increased threats due to climate change, the National Disaster Management Authority developed a draft policy in early 2023 that it refers to as the bedrock of India's climate change adaptation. It includes coastal and river erosion. The policy covers mitigation and resettlement of those displaced by such forms of erosion with the intended outcome of reducing loss of land, enhancing economic resilience and minimising vulnerability. However, uncertainty surrounds the future of climate resilience in this area because money allocation and disbursement are subject to the sway of politics.

—Courtesy, Al Jazeera

Hungarian foreign minister arrives for meeting in Ukraine

KYIV, 29 JAN

Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto arrived in the western Ukrainian city of Uzhhorod on Jan. 29 for bilateral talks with his Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba and Andriy Yermak, head of the office of the president. The president's office said that a "frank and constructive dialogue is expected." Hungary and Ukraine have had a contentious relationship that has worsened since the beginning of the full-scale invasion. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban has maintained close ties with Russia, bucking the united front that the EU has tried to present in support of Ukraine. Orban has opposed the launch of Ukraine's EU accession negotiations, and blocked the passage of a 50 billion euro aid package for Ukraine. *—Courtesy, The Kyiv Independent*

SL fishing boats reportedly hijacked by Somali pirates

COLOMBO, 29 JAN

Sri Lanka's diplomats are talking with Somali authorities trying to ascertain the whereabouts of a fishing vessel and its six crewmembers suspected of being abducted by Somali pirates two days ago, officials said on Monday. The apparent abduction came two weeks after Sri Lanka said it would join a US-led operation to protect merchant vessels sailing in the Red Sea against attacks by Yemen-based Houthi rebels. Other suspected hijackings in waters off Somalia have raised concern that Somali pirates have resumed activity, a decade after they caused chaos in international shipping. The hijacking of the Sri Lankan vessel occurred in international waters about 840 nautical miles (1,555 kilometers) east of Somalia, 1,100 nautical miles (2,040 kilometers) from Sri Lanka and north of Seychelles, according to Sri Lankan navy spokesman Capt. *—AP*

PHOTO: X

US: Indian student hammered to death by drug addict

NEW YORK, 29 JAN

A 25-year-old Indian student who recently earned an MBA degree in the US was hammered to death by a homeless drug addict whom he had been helping for the past couple of days in Georgia state's Lithonia city. The horrifying incident was caught on camera when assailant Julian Faulkner mercilessly struck Vivek Saini nearly 50 times on the head with a hammer. Saini, a part-time clerk at a store that sheltered Faulkner, had shown kindness to the accused for almost two days and provided him with chips, a coke, water, and even a jacket for warmth, M9 News Channel reported on Sunday. However, Saini was struck on 16 January while going home as he, concerned for safety, requested Faulkner to depart or face police intervention. Police, arriving at the scene, found Faulkner standing over Saini's lifeless body.*—PTI*

X blocks Taylor Swift searches after AI videos go viral

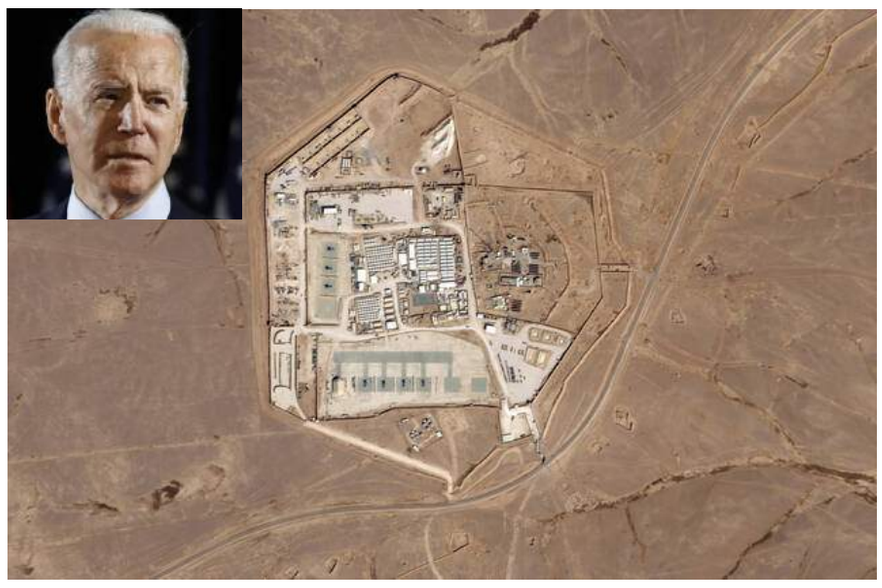
NEW YORK, 29JAN

Social media platform X has blocked searches for Taylor Swift after explicit AI-generated images of the singer began circulating on the site. In a statement to the BBC, X's head of business operations Joe Benarroch said it was a "temporary action" to prioritise safety. When searching for Swift on the site, a message appears that says: "Something went wrong. Try reloading." Fake graphic images of the singer appeared on the site earlier this week. Some went viral and were viewed millions of times, prompting alarm from US officials and fans of the singer. Posts and accounts sharing the fake images were flagged by her fans, who populated the platform with real images and videos of her, using the words "protect Taylor Swift". *—BBC News*

'US may respond to drone strike by Iran-backed group'

Said US President Joe Biden after 3 troops were killed

COLUMBIA, 29 JAN



Biden blamed Iran-backed militias for the first US fatalities after months of strikes by such groups against American forces across the Middle East ***PHOTO: PLANET LABS PBC/ AP***

US President Joe Biden said on Sunday that the US "shall respond" after three American troops were killed and dozens more were injured in an overnight drone strike in northeast Jordan near the Syrian border.

Biden blamed Iran-backed militias for the first US fatalities after months of strikes by such groups against American forces across the Middle East since the start of the Israel-Hamas war.

Biden, who was travelling in South Carolina, asked for a moment of silence during an appearance at a Baptist church's banquet hall.

"We had a tough day last night in the Middle East. We lost three brave souls in an attack on one of our bases," he said. After the moment of silence, Biden added, "and we shall respond".

With an increasing risk of military escalation in the region, US officials were working to conclusively identify the precise group responsible for the attack, but they have assessed that one of several Iranian-backed groups was behind it.

Biden said in a written statement that the United States "will hold all those responsible to account at a time and in a manner (of) our choosing." Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin said "we will take all necessary actions to defend the United States, our troops, and our interests".

Iran-backed fighters in east Syria began evacuating their posts, fearing US airstrikes, according to Omar Abu Layla, a Europe-based activist who heads the Deir Ezzor 24 media outlet. He told The Associated Press that the areas are the strongholds of Mayadeen and Boukamal.

US Central Command said at least 34 troops were injured by the one-way attack drone, with eight flown out of Jordan for follow-up care. It described the eight as being in stable condition.

The large drone struck a logistics support base in Jordan known as Tower 22. It is along the Syrian border and is used largely by troops involved in the advise-and-assist mission for Jordanian forces.

Central Command said approximately 350 US Army and Air Force personnel were deployed to the base.

The three who were killed and most of the wounded were Army soldiers, according to several US officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to give details not yet made public. *—AP*

Iran: 4 executed over attempted sabotage

TEHRAN, 29 JAN

Iran executed on Monday four men convicted of planning sabotage and alleged links with Israel's Mossad secret service, state media reported.

The official IRNA news agency said the men were convicted of planning to target a factory in 2022 belonging to Iran's defense ministry and involved in missile and defense equipment in the central city of Isfahan. The operation was allegedly engineered by Mossad and the four were trained by the Israeli agency in an African country before entering Iran, it said.

The four were identified as Iranian nationals: Mohammad Faramarzi, Mohsen Mazloum, Vafa Azarbar and Pejman Fatehi. The execution was carried out after the country's Supreme Court upheld their death sentences, handed down by another court in September. The report did not say how the death sentences were carried out, but in Iran it's usually by hanging.

In 2022, Iran said its intelligence agents had dismantled a group linked to Mossad that had allegedly planned terror operations inside Iran, arresting all members of the group and confiscating a large amount of weapons and explosives. *—AP*

DONALD TRUMP: WE ARE ON THE BRINK OF WORLD WAR 3

WASHINGTON, 29 JAN

Donald Trump said Joe Biden had left the globe on the "brink of World War Three" after a drone attack on a base in Jordan killed three US troops. The former president rounded on his successor in a vociferous tirade following Sunday's incident, which the White House blamed on "Iran-backed" militants operating in the Middle East. "This brazen attack on the United States is yet another horrific and tragic consequence of Joe Biden's weakness and surrender," Trump said in a statement. "Three years ago, Iran was weak, and totally under control. Thanks to my maximum pressure policy, the Iranian regime could barely scrape two dollars together to fund their terrorist proxies," he said. *—Courtesy, The Statesman*

IMPEACHMENT MOTION

Maldives Prez faces domestic criticism

MALE, 29 JAN

The main Opposition MDP, which holds a majority in the Maldivian Parliament, is planning to submit a motion to impeach President Mohamed Muizzu, according to media reports on Monday.

The development comes a day after clashes broke out in Parliament on Sunday between pro-government MPs and opposition lawmakers over differences over the approval of four members of the pro-China President's cabinet. After the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) and The Democrats' parliamentary group decided to withhold parliamentary approval for four members of President Muizzu's cabinet ahead of the voting, the pro-government MPs from the ruling party Progressive Party of Maldives and People's National Congress (PPM/PNC) coalition initiated a protest, obstructing the parliamentary sitting.

"The MDP, in partnership with the Democrats, have gathered enough signatures for an impeachment motion. However, they have yet to submit it," Sun.com said, quoting a lawmaker from the MDP. The decision to submit an impeachment motion was taken unanimously in the parliamentary group meeting of the MDP held on Monday, The Edition.mv reported.

Muizzu, 45, defeated India-friendly incumbent Ibrahim Mohamed Solih in the presidential runoff held in September last year. Soon after taking oath as the President of Maldives on 17 November, Muizzu formally requested India to withdraw 88 military personnel from his country by 15 March, saying the Maldivian people have given him a "strong mandate" to make this request to New Delhi. *—PTI*

Kim directs missiles to be test fired from submarines: N Korea

SEOUL, 29 JAN

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un supervised test firings of new cruise missiles designed to be launched from submarines and also reviewed efforts to build a nuclear-powered submarine while reiterating his goal of building a nuclear-armed navy to counter what he portrays as growing external threats, state media said Monday. The report came a day after South Korea's military said it detected North Korea firing multiple cruise missiles over waters near the eastern port of Sinpo, where the North has a major shipyard developing submarines. It was the latest in a streak of weapons demonstrations by North Korea amid increasing tensions with the United States, South Korea and Japan. North Korea's newspaper Rodong Sinmun published photos of what appeared to be at least two missiles fired separately. Both created grayish-white clouds as they broke the water surface and soared into the air at an angle of around 45 degrees, which possibly suggests they were fired from torpedo launch tubes. State media said missiles were Pulhwasal-3-31, a new type of weapon first tested last week. *—AP*

Poll violence rising in Karachi ahead of 8 Feb poll, 1 dead

KARACHI, 29 JAN

An injured police officer lies on the road during a clash with supporters of Imran Khan's party in Karachi, Pakistan ***PHOTO: REUTERS***

Tensions are escalating in Pakistan's largest city of Karachi as the country gears up for the general elections on 8 February with several clashes already taking place between the contesting parties vying for national and provincial Assembly seats. Police confirmed one people died during the clash

On Monday, violent clashes erupted in Nazimanad, resulting in the death of a worker from the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM Pakistan) and injuries to three others during an exchange of gunfire with Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) workers.

A day earlier on Sunday, heavy contingents of police baton charged, fired tear gas shells and forcibly dispersed an election rally of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party in Clifton area.

At least 25 people, including some policemen, were injured in the fiasco.

The PPP stronghold over the southern Sindh province, particularly Karachi -- also Pakistan's financial hub, faces a challenge as various parties compete fiercely in the upcoming elections.

The Bilawal Zardari-Bhutto-led PPP's hold on Sindh and Karachi has remained even when the Khan-led PTI formed the government in the last elections in 2018 and also during the Shahbaz Sharif-led coalition government formed in 2022 after a vote of no confidence ended the PTI governance. However, despite the PPP's enduring influence in Sindh and Karachi, in the prevailing political scenario, there is a potential for shift in power dynamics, according to political observers.

The PPP, MQM-P, PTI, Jamaat-e-Islaami, and some independent candidates are the key players for the elections in Karachi. Former prime minister Nawaz Sharif-led Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), which is predicted to win the national elections, appears to have a limited stake in the port city, and is directing its focus on other provinces.

The intensifying pre-election violence in Karachi is exacerbated by the participation of former elected MQM members and its splinter groups as well as PTI members contesting as independent candidates. Reports of clashes between supporters of PPP, PTI, and MQM-P have surfaced in various areas since the commencement of the poll campaign last week. *—PTI*

Japan moon lander resumes mission

TOKYO, 29 JAN

Japan's Moon lander has resumed operations after being shut for a week due to a power supply issue.

The Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency said it re-established contact with the lander Sunday night, indicating that the glitch had been fixed.

Its solar cells are working again after a shift in lighting conditions allowed it to catch sunlight, the agency said. It could not generate power when it landed on 20 January as the solar cells pointed away from the Sun.

With the Smart Lander for Investigating Moon (Slim) spacecraft, Japan became only the fifth country to achieve a soft touchdown on the Moon after the US, the former Soviet Union, China and India.

The spacecraft ran on battery power for several hours before authorities decided to turn it off to allow for a possible recovery of electricity when the angle of sunlight changed. Jaxa shared a photograph taken by Slim of a nearby rock that it nicknamed a "toy poodle".

The lander will analyse the composition of rocks in its search for clues about the origin of the moon, JAXA said. Slim landed at the edge of an equatorial crater known as Shioli, within 55m of its target in a crater.

The landing technology could allow future exploration of hilly Moon poles seen as potential sources of fuel, water and oxygen, the agency said. *—BBC News*

52 killed in clashes in oil-rich region of Africa: Official

ABYEI, 29 JAN

Gunmen attacked villagers in the oil-rich region of Abyei claimed by both Sudan and South Sudan, leaving at least 52 people dead, including a UN peacekeeper, and 64 wounded, a regional official said Sunday.

The motive for the attack Saturday evening was not immediately clear, but it was suspected to revolve around a land dispute, Bulis Koch, Abyei information minister, told The Associated Press in a telephone interview from Abyei.

Deadly ethnic violence has been common in the region, where Twic Dinka tribal members from neighbouring Warrap State are locked in a land dispute with Ngok Dinka from Abyei over the Aneet area, located at the border.

The attackers in Saturday's violence were armed youths from the Nuer tribe who migrated to Warrap state last year because of flooding in their areas, Koch said.

In a statement, the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) condemned the violence that killed the peacekeepers.

UNIFSA confirmed intercommoned clashes took place in the Nyinkuac, Majbong and Khadian areas, leading to casualties and the evacuation of civilians to UNISFA bases. "The UNISFA base in Agok came under attack by an armed group. The mission repelled the attack, but tragically a Ghanaian peacekeeper was killed," the statement said.

Sudan and South Sudan have disagreed over control of the Abyei region since a 2005 peace deal ended decades of civil war between Sudan's north and south. Both Sudan and South Sudan claim ownership of Abyei, whose status was unresolved after South Sudan became independent of Sudan in 2011.

The region's majority Ngok Dinka people favor South Sudan, while the Misseriya nomads who come to Abyei to find pasture for their cattle favor Sudan. Currently, the region is under the control of South Sudan.

An African Union panel proposed a referendum for Abyei but there was disagreement over who could vote. Currently, the region is under the control of South Sudan. *—AP*

UNISFA strongly condemns the attacks, causing civilian casualties and the death of a UN peacekeeper from Ghana ***PHOTO:X/UNISFA***

10 PEOPLE INDICTED

Japan PM Kishida fighting a party corruption scandal

TOKYO, 29 JAN

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida on Monday was forced to start this year's parliamentary session with an apology over one of the country's biggest corruption scandals in decades.

Prosecutors recently indicted 10 people, including three lawmakers and a number of political aides, in the latest hit to Kishida's already unpopular Cabinet.

The AP explains the scandal and what it means to Kishida's government and Japan.

What is the scandal about?

The scandal centres on political funds raised through party event tickets bought by individuals, companies and organizations. Dozens of lawmakers in Kishida's Liberal Democratic Party are alleged to have pocketed profits from ticket sales as kickbacks by falsifying mandatory accounting reports. Last year a number of LDP lawmakers, mostly members of a faction previously led by assassinated former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, were accused of systematically not reporting hundreds of millions of yen in funds, in violation of the Political Funds Control Law. The money was alleged to have gone into unmonitored slush funds.

What have prosecutors done?

The Tokyo District Prosecutors Office indicted seven people from the Abe faction, known as Seiwakai, including three lawmakers, for allegedly not reporting 675 million yen (USD 4.6 million) over the past five years.

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida raises his hand before he speaks during a meeting on Monday ***PHOTO: KYODO NEWS***

Prosecutors separately interviewed at least seven of the faction's most influential lawmakers, including former Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno and former Economy and Industry Minister Yasutoshi Nishimura, but dropped the case against them because of the difficulty in proving their collusion with the accountants.

- He abruptly announced that he was stepping down as head of his faction. After prosecutors indicted party lawmakers and aides, Kishida announced a decision to dissolve his faction

How is Kishida responding?

At Monday's televised parliamentary session, Kishida apologised again over the scandal and pledged to lead reforms.

In late December, he abruptly announced that he was stepping down as head of his faction. After prosecutors indicted party lawmakers and aides, Kishida announced a decision to dissolve his faction, prompting three other factions linked to the scandal to follow suit.

What are the factions?

The LDP, since its birth in the 1950s, has had a number of factions develop into institutions that now need to compete in party power struggles for leadership and key government posts. Factions are customarily led by political heavyweights and kingmakers.

For the LDP, which has reigned almost uninterruptedly in postwar Japan, its in-party factions have largely served to raise funds, mainly for elections and the backing of their candidates during campaigns.

How is the scandal affecting Kishida's government?

The Kishida administration's support ratings have dropped to around 20 per cent. While his leadership may not last as long as initially thought, the LDP appears likely stay in power because the largely fractured opposition parties are not seen as a viable alternative.

Kishida doesn't have to call a parliamentary election until 2025, but his party has set a leadership vote in September. *—AP*

Rupee falls 3 paise to close at 83.14 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 29 JAN

Rupee depreciated 3 paise to 83.14 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, as rising crude oil prices in international markets and dollar demand from importers dented investor sentiments.Forex traders said the rupee traded in a narrow range as the support from positive domestic equities was offset by persistent foreign fund outflows.At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.14 against the US dollar. During the day, it witnessed an intraday high of 83.13 and a low of 83.15 against the American currency.The local unit finally settled at 83.14 (provisional) against the dollar, down by 3 paise from its previous close.On Thursday, the rupee rose 1 paisa in a range-bound trade to close at 83.11 against the US dollar.Forex market was closed on Friday on account of Republic Day. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, rose 0.12 per cent to 103.55. *–PTI*

Gold, silver prices appreciate by ₹200 each

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

Gold prices rose by Rs 200 to Rs 63,100 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday amid strong global cues, according to HDFC Securities.The precious metal settled at Rs 62,900 per 10 grams in the previous trade.Silver prices also increased by Rs 200 to Rs 76,400 per kg."Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 63,100 per 10 grams, up by Rs 200, following stronger overseas gold prices," Dilip Parmar, research analyst at HDFC Securities, said. In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,031 per ounce, up by USD 13 from the previous close.Gold prices increased after mixed US economic data which pushed the dollar slightly lower while the risk sentiment remains firm, Parmar said.Also, silver was trading marginally higher at USD 22.99 per ounce in the global markets. Traders believe that gold may appreciate in the near future amid geopolitical concerns in the Middle East and the possibility that the US Federal Reserve would delay the monetary policy interest rate cut, Parmar added *—PTI*

Accenture to enhance Indo Count's biz ops

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

IT consulting firm Accenture is collaborating with Indo Count Industries to enhance the home textile manufacturer's business operations using digital technologies. This will help unlock efficiencies and new growth avenues, the release said but did not indicate the size of the contract."As part of Indo Count's digital transformation and reinvention journey, Accenture will help to standardise, optimise and re-engineer its business processes. Targeted functions include manufacturing, supply chain, logistics, and procurement," the release said. Accenture will design, develop, and deploy a digital core using SAP S/4HANA Cloud (enterprise resource planning software).' Indo Count Industries Ltd is a home textile manufacturer.*—PTI*

AU Small Finance Bank shares fall nearly 12%

JAIPUR, 29 JAN

Shares of AU Small Finance Bank Ltd on Monday tumbled nearly 12 per cent after the company reported a 4 per cent decline in net profit at Rs 375 crore for the third quarter ended December 2023, mainly due to a rise in bad loans.The stock plunged 11.72 per cent to Rs 625 on the BSE.At the NSE, it fell by 11.79 per cent to Rs 624.35. However, Jaipur-based bank had earned a profit of Rs 393 crore in the same quarter of FY23.The total income of the bank increased to Rs 3,186 crore during the quarter under review, against Rs 2,413 crore in the same period last year, AU Small Finance Bank said in a regulatory filing on Thursday.*—PTI*

Equity benchmarks surge nearly 2%, investors gain big

BSE Sensex jumped 1,240.90 points or 1.76 per cent to settle at 71,941.57

MUMBAI, 29 JAN

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded sharply on Monday, surging nearly 2 per cent, buoyed by robust buying in Reliance Industries and a rally in Asian markets.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 1,240.90 points or 1.76 per cent to settle at 71,941.57. During the day, it soared 1,309.55 points or 1.85 per cent to 72,010.22.

The Nifty climbed 385 points or 1.80 per cent to 21,737.60.

Among the Sensex firms, Reliance Industries jumped nearly 7 per cent, contributing the most to the rally in markets.

Tata Motors, Power Grid, Larsen and Toubro, Kotak Mahindra Bank, NTPC, Titan and UltraTech Cement were the other major gainers.

ITC, Infosys, JSW Steel, Tech Mahindra and Tata Consultancy Services were the laggards.

"The domestic market underwent an upturn as the recent sell-off and positive Asian peers provided an opportunity to accumulate quality stocks.

Reliance Industries jumped nearly 7 per cent, contributing the most to the rally in markets *PHOTO: PTI*

Despite premium valuations, confidence is upheld among investors due to the optimistic environment surrounding the interim budget and recent set of results aligning with forecasts.

"Globally, the upcoming Fed policy stands out as a crucial factor. While a rate cut by the FOMC is unlikely, investors will eagerly monitor their commentary to get cues on future rate paths," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge climbed 1.68 per cent and smallcap index rallied 1.03 per cent.

Among the indices, energy jumped 5.29 per cent, oil & gas zoomed 4.94 per cent, power (3.03 per cent), services (2.82 per cent), capital goods (2.13 per cent), industrials (2.17 per cent) and consumer durables (1.93 per cent).

FMCG, IT and teck were the laggards.

A total of 2,266 stocks advanced while 1,654 declined and 141 remained unchanged.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory while Shanghai ended lower.

European markets were trading mostly lower. The US markets had ended on a mixed note on Friday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.18 per cent to USD 83.40 a barrel.Markets were closed on Friday on account of Republic Day.

On Thursday, the BSE benchmark declined 359.64 points or 0.51 per cent to settle at 70,700.67 points while the Nifty fell 101.35.

—PTI

Reliance Industries shares jump over 7%

MUMBAI, 29 JAN

Shares of Reliance Industries were in heavy demand, climbing over 7 per cent in late afternoon trade on Monday, with its market valuation crossing Rs 19.56 lakh crore mark.

Shares of Reliance Industries were in heavy demand, climbing over 7 per cent in late afternoon trade on Monday, with its market valuation crossing Rs 19.56 lakh crore mark.

Rallying for the third day running, the blue-chip stock zoomed 6.81 per cent to reach an all-time peak of Rs 2,895.10 apiece on the BSE.

On the NSE, it jumped 7.16 per cent to reach a record high of Rs 2,900 per share.

—PTI

148% JUMP

The consolidated net profit of the company was at Rs 103 crore in the year-ago period *PHOTO: PTI*

Adani Green Q3 net profit jumps to ₹256 crore

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

- The Adani Group company had raised over Rs 62,000 crore through the issuance of NCDs (non-convertible debentures) which will mature in September this year. The solar portfolio CUF remained stable

Adani Green Energy on Monday posted an over 148 per cent jump in consolidated net profit to Rs 256 crore in the three months ended December 2023, mainly on the back of higher revenues. The consolidated net profit of the company was at Rs 103 crore in the year-ago period, according to a regulatory filing.

Total income rose to Rs 2,675 crore in the third quarter of the current fiscal from Rs 2,256 crore in the same period a year ago.

The company's operational capacity grew 16 per cent Y-o-Y (Year-on-Year) to 8,478 MW with greenfield addition of 700 MW solar-wind hybrid, 304 MW wind and 150 MW solar projects.

The sale of energy increased 59 per cent Y-o-Y to 16,293 million units during the April-December 2023 period, primarily backed by strong capacity addition and improved CUF (Capacity Utilisation Factor).

Adani Green Energy Ltd (AGEL) on Monday said it has completed the funding for redemption of over Rs 62,000 crore bonds, eight months ahead of their maturity.

The Adani Group company had raised over Rs 62,000 crore through the issuance of NCDs (non-convertible debentures) which will mature in September this year.

In the nine months ended December 2023, the solar portfolio CUF remained stable at 24 per cent, wind portfolio CUF improved to 32.2 per cent and the CUF of solar-wind hybrid portfolio improved to 41.5 per cent.

On 8 January, AGEL had announced a plan to ensure early redemption of its Rs 62,000 crore bonds.

In a statement on Monday, AGEL said it has 'completed the funding for the USD 750 million 4.375 notes due September 9, 2024 (Holdco Notes) with the receipt of the funds under the preferential allotment of Rs 9,350 crore (USD 1,125 million) to the promoters.'

Sharing a break-up, AGEL said Rs 14,000 crore has been put through the reserve accounts and internal accruals, while about Rs 25,000 crore has recently been invested by TotalEnergies through a joint venture.The remaining Rs 23,000 crore million has been secured through promoter preferential allotment. *—PTI*

The firm has been the poster child of China's real estate crisis with more than $300bn (£236bn) of debt *PHOTO: PTI*

China's property giant Evergrande ordered to liquidate

BEIJING, 29 JAN

Debt-laden Chinese property giant Evergrande has been ordered to liquidate by a court in Hong Kong.

Judge Linda Chan said "enough is enough" after the troubled developer repeatedly failed to come up with a plan to restructure its debts.

The firm has been the poster child of China's real estate crisis with more than $300bn (£236bn) of debt.

When Evergrande defaulted two years ago it sent shockwaves through global financial markets.

Evergrande's executive director, Shawn Siu, described the decision as "regrettable", but said the company would continue to operate in mainland China.

The firm's Hong Kong arm was independent from its mainland business, he added in a statement.

While any potential impact of the ruling on Evergrande's home building business is currently unclear, the crisis at the company has already left many home buyers waiting for their new properties.

The court's decision is also likely to send further ripples through China's financial markets at a time when authorities are trying to curb a stock market sell-off.

China's property sector contributes roughly a quarter of the world's second biggest economy.

Evergrande shares fell by more than 20 per cent in Hong Kong after the announcement on Monday. Trading in the shares has now been suspended.

Court document released on Monday said the company had asked for further three months to come up with a new restructuring plan, but it only requested it at 4pm on Friday.

Judge Chan described the new plan as "not even a restructuring proposal, much less a fully formulated proposal".

The liquidation order against the parent company does not mean an immediate suspension of Evergrande's construction work, either. *—PTI*

SpiceJet gets over ₹900 crore funding; cost cutting in focus

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

With more than Rs 900 crore funding coming in this month, SpiceJet will focus on upgradation of its fleet and cost-cutting measures, as the no-frills airline works on ways to come out of turbulent times.

In an internal note to the senior staff on January 29, the airline said it now has a substantial bank balance of more than Rs 900 crore, including Rs 160 crore received as an instalment under the Government's Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS).

The carrier, which had been facing multiple headwinds in recent months, has so far received around Rs 1,000 crore under the ECLGS.

Last week, the airline announced it has received the first tranche of Rs 744 crore as part of the total Rs 2,250 crore being mopped up through issuance of securities on a preferential basis.

On 12 December, the airline said it would raise fresh capital of Rs 2,250 crore through issuance of securities.

Revival path

During a meeting with the airline's senior officials, Singh emphasised the importance of judicious spending and that he will personally oversee all major expenditures.

Currently, the airline has an operational fleet of around 40 planes.

SpiceJet, which has also expressed an interest to bid for bankrupt Go First, will be looking to raise more funds to shore up its financial position.

As it embarks on the revival path, the airline has also issued a stern directive of 'perform or perish' to tackle under performance.

—PTI

Spicejet will be looking to raise more funds to shore up its financial position *PHOTO: SPICEJET*

Auto parts' aftermarket may touch $14 B mark

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

The domestic auto component aftermarket is expected to touch USD 14 billion mark by 2028 on the back of robust growth in vehicle parc in the country, a report commissioned by industry body ACMA in partnership with Ernst & Young said. As per the Global Automotive Aftermarket Research Report, the size of the automotive aftermarket stood at USD 10 billion in 2023.

The growth of aftermarket in India is being fuelled by a steady increase in the vehicle parc — number of vehicles running on the road — which currently stands at 340 million and is expected to grow at a CAGR of over 8 per cent for the next five years, it added. "The Indian domestic aftermarket, valued at USD 10 billion in 2023, is poised to surge almost 1.4 times over the next five years on the back of growing vehicle demand and promising capabilities of the Indian aftermarket players," ACMA President Shradha Suri Marwah said in a statement.Besides, key ten international markets offer export opportunities of over USD 35 billion, she noted. The report focused on seven product categories namely engine, suspension, along with rubber components, cooling systems and filters. *—PTI*

TN needs $111 B investments for GSDP of ₹2.6 T

CHENNAI, 29 JAN

Tamil Nadu would require investments of USD 111 billion for the state's economy to reach USD 2.6 trillion by 2047, a study conducted by global real estate consultancy Knight Frank India said on Monday.The services sector has been identified as the primary driver of Tamil Nadu's economy, accounting for 53 per cent of the total gross state domestic product (GSDP), according to the study.

The manufacturing sector is expected to reach USD 374 billion by FY 2047-48, with a growth rate of 19 per cent, according to the report. *—PTI*

Samsung to make laptops in India

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

Korean electronics major Samsung plans to start manufacturing laptops at its Noida factory in India this year, a senior company official said on Monday.Terming India as its important manufacturing base, Samsung Electronics President and Head of Mobile eXperience (MX) Business TM Roh told reporters here that the preparation for the laptop manufacturing is in progress in India.

"We will start manufacturing laptops this year at the Noida factory. Preparations are already underway," said the official, who is on an India visit. Roh said India is an important manufacturing base for the company, and it has received support at various levels from the state and central governments.

The company will continue to cooperate with the government to strengthen manufacturing in India, he added.

The company has recently launched its flagship Galaxy S24 series smartphone with a key focus on artificial intelligence capability in the device.Samsung has announced that it will also manufacture Galaxy S24 at its Noida factory.

The Noida plant has started making feature phones, smartphones, wearable, and tablets, and now the company will start manufacturing laptops this year. *—PTI*

PHOTO: SAMSUNG

'India will be 3rd largest economy'

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

India is expected to become the third-largest economy in the world with a GDP of USD 5 trillion in the next three years and touch USD 7 trillion by 2030 on the back of continued reforms, the finance ministry said on Monday.

Ten years ago, India was the 10th largest economy in the world, with a GDP of USD 1.9 trillion at current market prices.

Today, it is the 5th largest with a GDP of USD 3.7 trillion (estimate FY24), despite the pandemic and despite inheriting an economy with macro imbalances and a broken financial sector, said the ministry's January 2024 review of the economy.

PHOTO: PTI

"This ten-year journey is marked by several reforms, both substantive and incremental, which have significantly contributed to the country's economic progress," it said.

These reforms, it added, have also delivered an economic resilience that the country will need to deal with unanticipated global shocks in the future. *—PTI*

CULTURED MEAT

In a first, CMFRI to develop lab-grown fish meat

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

In a groundbreaking initiative, the ICAR-Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) has undertaken a pioneering effort to develop lab-grown fish meat, marking a significant first in India. The project aims to propel India forward in the realm of cultured marine fish meat, with the goal of meeting the increasing demand for seafood while alleviating the excessive strain on wild resources, an official release said here on Monday.

In the release, CMFRI said cultivated fish meat or lab grown fish meat is produced by isolating specific cells from the fish and growing them in the laboratory setting using animal component free media. The final product will replicate the original flavour, texture and nutritional qualities of the fish, it said.

In the initial phase, the institute focuses on developing cell-based meat of high value marine fishes such as king fish, pomfret and seer fish. In line with this, the CMFRI has entered into a collaborative research agreement with Neat Meatt Biotech, a start-up working towards developing cultivated meat, to launch this initiative in a public-private partnership mode.

Cultivated fish meat is produced by isolating specific cells growing them in a lab using animal component free media *PHOTO: WILDTYPE*

- CMFRI Director A Gopalakrishnan and Co-founder and CEO of the Neat Meatt Biotech Sandeep Sharma signed a MoU regarding this, it said

CMFRI Director A Gopalakrishnan and Co-founder and CEO of the Neat Meatt Biotech Sandeep Sharma signed a Memorandum of Understanding regarding this, it said.According to the MoU, CMFRI will carry out research on early cell line development of high value marine fish species. This involves isolating and cultivating fish cells for further research and development.Additionally, CMFRI will handle genetic, biochemical, and analytical work related to the project. The institute is equipped with a cell culture laboratory with basic facilities, providing a solid foundation for research in cellular biology, it said. Neat Meatt will lead the optimization of cell growth media, development of scaffolds or microcarriers and scaling up production through bioreactors. "Lab-grown fish offers immense potential for environmental and food security benefits, and this collaboration leverages CMFRI's marine research expertise with Neat Meatt's technological know-how in this field, paving the way for a sustainable and secure future for seafood production in India", CEO said.

—PTI

Nikhat, Lovlina to take part in Strandja Memorial

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

Two-time world champion Nikhat Zareen and Olympic bronze medallist Lovlina Borgohain will be among the 19 Indians competing in the Strandja Memorial boxing tournament beginning in Sofia, Bulgaria on February 1. The squad participating in the Strandja meet is different from the one that will compete at the Olympic qualifiers later in February. Nikhat, Preeti and Lovlina have already secured an Olympic quota while no male boxer is yet to do that. World championships silver medallist Amit will lead a dense men's field. Elite Men: Barun Singh Shagolshem (48kg), Amit (51kg), Sachin (57kg), Akash Ramesh Gorkha (60kg), Vanshaj (63.50kg), Rajat (67kg), Akash (71kg), Deepak (75kg), Abhimanyu Loura (80kg), Jugnoo (86 kg), Naveen Kumar (92kg), (Sagar 92+kg). —*PTI*

PHOTO: ESPN

Nadal's 2007 French Open winning racket sells for $118k

PARIS, 29 JAN

Rafael Nadal's championship point winning racket from his 2007 French Open final victory over Roger Federer was sold for more than $118,000 at an auction on Monday, ranking among the highest-priced such memorabilia. Nadal beat Federer 6-3, 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 in the 2007 final in Paris to win his third Grand Slam title before the Spaniard moved on to secure a further 19 - 14 of them at Roland Garros - becoming one of the sport's greatest players. The racket, which Nadal also used in previous matches of the tournament, including his semifinal victory against Novak Djokovic, sold for $118,206 at an online auction that closed on Monday. It was previously housed in the Australian Tennis Museum prior to its recent closure. —*Reuters*

Russian skater given 4 year ban for doping

MOSCOW, 29 JAN

Russian figure skater Kamila Valieva has been given a four-year ban for doping after initially being cleared. A Russian Anti-Doping Agency (Rusada) investigation found the teenager bore "no fault or negligence" for a failed test before the 2022 Winter Olympics when she was 15 years old. But the Court of Arbitration for Sport (Cas) has upheld an appeal by the World Anti-Doping Agency (Wada). "The doping of children is unforgivable," Wada said in response. News of Valieva's failed test only emerged after she had helped Russia to team gold in Beijing. The ban has been backdated to 25 December 2021 - the date Valieva took the failed test - and the Cas panel has also ordered "the disqualification all competitive results achieved" from that date. —*BBC News*

Spots up for grabs in Indian Open Race Walking

CHANDIGARH, 29 JAN

National teams for both men's and women's will be picked during the two-day Indian Open Race Walking competition, an Olympic qualifying competition, starting here on Tuesday. The selected teams across the two categories will compete in the inaugural Marathon Race Walking Mixed Relay to be held in Turkey in April, with top 22 teams getting automatic qualification for the Paris Olympics. The men's 20km event is likely to witness a tight contest between national record holder Akashdeep Singh, Asian bronze medallist Vikash Singh, Paramjeet Bisht and Suraj Panwar. The 23-year-old Panwar from Uttarakhand, who clocked 1:20:11 to narrowly miss the Paris Olympics qualification time of 1:20:10, will be determined to improve his timing. —*PTI*

Jadeja, KL Rahul to miss 2nd Test against England

Jadeja sustained a hamstring injury while going for a quick single

HYDERABAD, 29 JAN

India all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja and batter KL Rahul were on Monday ruled out of the second Test against England, dealing a body blow to the hosts after a shock loss in the series opener here.

Jadeja sustained a hamstring injury while going for a quick single on Sunday while Rahul complained of pain in his right quadriceps. Worryingly, Rahul had also injured his right thigh while fielding in the IPL in May last year and that required a surgery, keeping him out of the game for four months.

"Ravindra Jadeja and KL Rahul have been ruled out of the second IDFC First Bank Test against England in Vizag, starting February 02, 2024," the BCCI said in a media release. "The BCCI Medical Team is monitoring the progress of the duo," it added.

The selection committee has added Mumbai batter Sarfaraz Khan, left-arm spinner Sourabh Kumar and all-rounder Washington Sundar to the squad for the second Test. It is a maiden national call up for Sarfaraz after scoring truck load of runs in domestic cricket and more recently in the India A series against England Lions.

Ravindra Jadeja sustained a hamstring injury while going for a quick single on Sunday while KL Rahul complained of pain in his right quadriceps **PHOTO: PTI**

With Virat Kohli already unavailable for the first two Tests due to personal reasons, the injuries to Jadeja and Rahul have made matters worse for India, who find themselves under pressure after losing only their fourth Test at home since 2013.

Both Rahul and Jadeja had made significant contributions in the first Test before England staged a remarkable comeback to win the game by 28 runs and go 1-0 up in the five-match series. Jadeja snapped up five wickets and made 87 in the first innings while Rahul scored 86.

- fJadeja's all-round abilities are invaluable to the team. Off-spinner Sundar, who has shown a lot of promise in his four-Test old career, could replace Jadeja in the playing eleven

Jadeja's all-round abilities are invaluable to the team. Off-spinner Sundar, who has shown a lot of promise in his four-Test old career, could replace Jadeja in the playing eleven.

Ever since making his comeback from injury in the Asia Cup in September, Rahul has displayed stellar form in the ODI and Test format. Keeping wickets in the ODI World Cup and more recently in the Test series in South Africa added to his workload. —*PTI*

BANTER WITH KING

Dean Elgar said after de Villiers found out about the incident, he took up the matter with his good friend **PHOTO: PTI**

Virat Kohli spat at me: Dean Elgar

CAPE TOWN, 29 JAN

Former South Africa skipper Dean Elgar has claimed that star India batter Virat Kohli "spat at him" during a Test match and apologised two years later after being confronted by his Royal Challengers Bangalore teammate AB de Villiers.

Elgar retired from international cricket after the conclusion of South Africa's two-Test series against India at home in December while standing-in for regular skipper Temba Bavuma. Without mentioning the series in which the incident took place, speculated to be South Africa's tour of India in 2015, Elgar agreed on a podcast that he had showdowns with Kohli and Ravichandran Ashwin.

"All the time," Elgar said on 'Banter with The Boys' podcast sitting alongside former South African all-rounder Chris Morris and rugby player Jean de Villiers.

Elgar then said, "In India...Those wickets were jokes." "And I came into bat and I was actually like holding my own against Ashwin and what's his name Jajeja... ja-ja-jajeja, ('Jadeja', said someone in the background) and Kohli, he like spat at me," Elgar said.

"I said to him, 'if you do that, I'll f*****g *** you with this bat'," Elgar claimed. "Did he understand that word?" asked the podcast host referring to the beeped out word. "Yes, he did because (AB) de Villiers was his teammate at RCB so he understood. I said 'if you do that, I'll absolutely knock you out'," Elgar claimed. PTI

- The former South African opener said after de Villiers found out about the incident, he took up the matter with his good friend and RCB teammate

The former South African opener said after de Villiers found out about the incident, he took up the matter with his good friend and RCB teammate. Elgar did not specify when exactly de Villiers discussed the incident with Kohli. —*PTI*

RANJI TROPHY ELITE GRP B

Uttar Pradesh hold nerves to pip Mumbai by 2 wkts

MUMBAI, 29 JAN

The efforts of Aryan Juyal (76) and Karan Sharma (67) stood out as Uttar Pradesh held nerves to beat 41-times champions and hosts Mumbai by two wickets in a Ranji Trophy match on Monday.

On the final day, Mumbai were bowled out for 320 after resuming at 303/8 in their second innings. Juyal and Karan laid the foundation of a tricky chase of 195 with a 104-run stand for the third wicket after UP were jolted twice early on.

Despite regular strikes from Mumbai, Karan stood tall with a 173-ball 67 not out (7x4s, 2x6s) to take his side over the line and help UP earn six points. The visitors Uttar Pradesh finished at 195/8 in almost 70 overs with right-arm off-spinner Tanush Kotian (5/58) leading the fightback for Mumbai with the ball.

In another game, Andhra crushed hosts Chhattisgarh at the Shaheed Veer Narayan Singh International Stadium in Raipur by 126 runs in what turned out to be a one-sided contest. Chasing 320 to win, the hosts were bowled out for a mere 193 despite opener Eknath Kerkar hitting a resolute 199-ball 76 at the top and skipper Amandeep Khare recording his second fifty of the game with a quickfire 67 off 55 balls with seven fours and two sixes.

It was an all-round show from the visiting Andhra team for whom Hanuma Vihari piled up 183 in their first-innings total of 431, which had Chhattisgarh buried under a mountain of pressure through the course of the game. While Nitish Kumar Reddy (3/36) and Prasanth Kumar (3/21) were among the top wicket-takers in the second innings, Prithvi Raj Yarra (2/40) and Girinath Reddy (1/25) also chipped in as Andhra walked away with six points. —*PTI*

KIYG: Sanjana improves her national mark in weightlifting

CHENNAI, 29 JAN

Sanjana of Haryana improved her national youth record enroute to a 76 kg gold in the weightlifting competition of the Khelo India Youth Games. Sayali Wani of Maharashtra bounced back from the brink to catch the girls' singles table tennis gold. Sanjana commenced by breaking her previous snatch record of 86 kg twice, successfully lifting 87 kg and 90 kg in her second and third attempts before successfully executing 113 kg and 116 kg lifts in Clean and Jerk. Grishma Thorat of Maharashtra won the silver with a total lift of 167 kg. Uttar Pradesh lifter Parv Chaudhary also bettered the Clean and Jerk national youth record in the boys' 96 kg category, lifting 160 kg for the gold. He lifted a total of 280 kg, with Arunesh Babu (258kg) and Aditya clinching the silver and bronze. —*PTI*

India declare SAFF U-19 Women's C'ship squad

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

The U19 women's national football team head coach Sukla Dutta on Monday announced a 23-member squad for the SAFF U19 Women's Championship 2024 scheduled to take place in Dhaka, Bangladesh, from 2 to 8 February.

The Young Tigresses will depart for Bangladesh on Tuesday. The Indian U19 girls, who finished runners-up in the 2021 edition, will open their campaign against Bhutan on February 2 followed by defending champions Bangladesh on February 4 and Nepal on February 6.

The tournament will be played in a round-robin format and the top two teams after the league round will face each other in the final. All the matches will be played at the Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Dhaka.

The 23-member squad: Khushi Kumari, Anika Devi Sharubam, Hempriya Seram, Heena Khatun, Vikshit Bara, Sonibia Devi Irom, Juhi Singh, Nishima Kumari, Shivani Toppo, Lalita Boypai, Akhila Rajan, Rivka Ramji, Arina Devi Nameirakpam, Cindy Remruatpuii Colney, Menaka Devi Lourembam, Sibani Devi Nongmeikapam, Thoibisana Chanu Toijam, Babita Kumari, Nitu Linda, Sulanjana Raul, Neha, Pooja, Sahena TH and Sukla Dutta. —*ANI*

TASTE THE FIST

Indian boxer Mandeep Jangra won the US-based National Boxing Association's intercontinental super featherweight title after defeating Gerardo Esquivel at Toppenish City, Washington **PHOTO: PTI**

Now I'm dreaming more than ever, says Danil Medvedev

MELBOURNE, 29 JAN

Despite falling to Jannik Sinner in the Australian Open final on Sunday in Melbourne, Daniil Medvedev is positive and determined to not let the defeat impact his season.

The 27-year-old lost the Australian Open final from two-sets-to-love up for the second time in three years. The third seed succumbed to Rafael Nadal in a five-set epic in the 2022 championship match. Back in 2022, Medvedev was devastated by his defeat, describing himself as a 'kid that had stopped dreaming' after the match.

Two years later, the World No3 is significantly more upbeat about his defeat to Sinner and is determined not to let it affect his season.

"Different feeling, different circumstances, I would say. Now I'm dreaming more than ever, probably not today, but in general in life," said Medvedev as quoted by ATP.

"But I would say it's not anymore a kid who is dreaming. It's me myself right now, a 27-year-old who is dreaming, and who's doing everything possible for my future and for my present. I love it. That's why I made it to the final. I wanted to win. I was close. The scoreline is similar but I think the match would be a bit different," he added.

"I managed to raise this level and become a different person with a different mentality. I'm really going to try to make everything possible with myself, with my mind, for this loss to not affect my future tournaments and future seasons, because that's part of sports," the 27-year-old added.

Medvedev, the 2021 US Open winner, jumped off to a two-set lead on Rod Laver Arena, aiming for his second major victory. However, Sinner, on the other hand, rallied to become only the third Italian guy to win a major. —*ANI*

Iraq's goalkeeper Jalal Hassan make s a save with a header in front of Jordan's Yazan Alnaimat during the match **PHOTO: PTI**

Jordan advances to the Asian Cup QF

AL-RAYYAN, 29 JAN

Jordan scored two goals in stoppage time to advance to the quarterfinals of the Asian Cup on Monday after a 3-2 comeback win against 10-man Iraq.

Yazan Al Arab leveled the game at Khalifa International Stadium in the fifth minute of added time and Nizar Al Rashdan netted the winner two minutes later.

The round-of-16 match was turned on its head when Aymen Hussein was shown a second yellow card and sent off for excessive celebrations after putting Iraq 2-1 ahead.

The 2007 champion couldn't hold on to its lead and eventually folded under the pressure as Jordan mounted a late fightback. Iraq had beaten pre-tournament favorite Japan and advanced to the knockout stage as winner of Group D. And in Hussein, it had the most prolific striker in the competition with five goals in the group stage.

- The round-of-16 match was turned on its head when Hussein was shown a second yellow card and sent off for excessive celebrations after putting Iraq 2-1 ahead

While Hussein added to that total, his red card proved pivotal to Iraq's elimination. Jordan advanced as one of the best third-placed teams and took the lead against Iraq in the first minute of first-half stoppage time through Yazan Al Naimat.

Suad Natiq equalized for Iraq with a header in the 68th and Hussein fired low in the 76th to put his team ahead. His celebrations, however, earned him that crucial second booking. —*AP*

MENDONCA WINS CHALLENGER

Gukesh finishes joint second in Masters

Indian raised visions of winning the tournament but Wei Yi was far better in the return game **PHOTO: X/TATA STEEL CHESS PHOTO**

WIJK AAN ZEE, 29 JAN

Grandmaster D Gukesh endured a heartbreak in the final tie-breaker against Wei Yi of China and had to be content with a joint second place finish at the Tata Steel Masters chess tournament.

Indian Grandmaster Leon Luke Mendonca, however, won the challengers section, defeating compatriot Divya Deshmukh in the 13th and final round. It was a full day of hard work for Gukesh as he had to win the 13th round game with black against Parham Maghsoodloo of Iran and then prove superior in three tie-break games against last year's winner Anish Giri to qualify for the final.

Once there, the Indian raised visions of winning the tournament but Wei Yi was simply better in the return game after drawing the first.

If Gukesh was a heartbreak, Mendonca remained pretty much in the shadows throughout the event in the company of big stalwarts. Mendonca defeated Divya in another complicated game that could have swung either ways but the latter was the first to err as she went for a wrong capture in the middle game.

"I am very happy and relieved because it was not clear at all throughout the tournament whether I was close to winning or not. It was only before this round that I had a real chance. I also needed a lot of luck as well but mostly I am just relieved," said Mendonca after his win.

Mendonca scored 3/6 in the first half of the event and then went on to score 6.5/7 in the second half. —*PTI*